DISRUPTING DICHOTOMIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SACRED AND SECULAR MUSIC PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

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What is the influence of gospel music on contemporary Black cultural music production? Historically, within Black Church circles, a distinction is made between gospel and secular music. This project interrogates this distinction and seeks to harmonize – in modern times – the false dichotomy. Divisive in nature, the sacred/secular dichotomy misses the connecting pieces that bind Black culture to its origins and disregards the unexplained synergy of experiences inside and outside of religious spaces. How is it possible that one could feel spiritually liberated in a church setting and a secular concert? Perhaps the roots of the music played in both venues are the same, generating similar responses.

This question is in a lineage of inquiries at the heart of Black culture and Black churches. Questions around the maintenance of Africanisms, African retentions, and cultural heirlooms for Black people in America remain at the root of concern for those in search of the relevance of their African past. Historians and sociologists like Melville Herskovits and C. Eric Lincoln have long debated the importance of understanding cultural productions and the significance of Black folk's creative genius under the guise of oppressed in the Americas. This work seeks to explore the root of the musings and creations that arose from enslaved Black folk's oppression and

reclaim the resemblance of dichotomized differences and the ideas surrounding them - the sacred and secular.

Using Performance Theory as a theoretical framework, seven Black cultural producers – with both religious and secular connections – were interviewed. Their interviews were analyzed, and the findings produced three themes around the simultaneity of sacred and temporal expressions. More specifically, the themes were Musical Background/performance (engaging the art), euphoria (ecstasy and Pentecostalism), and liberation (permission to participate in both towards actualized freedom). The results of the work were closely co-analyzed by theologians, biblical scholars, and ethnomusicologists in their respective fields. The project concludes with critical limitations and strategic implications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background

This chapter serves as an introduction to the question and thesis explored in this text. This chapter explores general observations about Black church culture, popular media, cultural production, and themes of liberation as justifiable contributors to the false dichotomy of the sacred and the secular in music production. Exclusion and inclusion also arise as significant themes that influence the conversation. Examples of historical figures and modern contemporaries in popular culture are used to describe resistance to the status quo agendas of seven historically Black denominations, particularly emphasizing the exclusion of Hip-Hop/protest culture and the affirmation and acceptance of Black women and Black queer folk.

This chapter also explores how space-making can be engaged toward an ethic of liberation as a spiritual leader by founding a virtual ministry. The chapter concludes with a brief preview and outline of the chapters to follow, detailing the format and layout of each heading and subheading. The following sections are listed as components that headline each chapter: Introduction to the Setting, Lessons from a Religious Practitioner, Ministerial Competencies, Methods, Findings, and Conclusion.

Desperation and Cultural Production in Black America

The histories of African-American cultural production cover a vast array of creativity in multiple spheres of human influence. There are very few places in the world where one may travel and not hear sonics and emotions influenced by the African-American experience. Whether we are rightly able to draw connections between cultures or infer the differences between them, there is one common denominator that pulls cultural productions of Black people together at the root: despair. Critically acclaimed womanist author Kelly Brown Douglas writes in her book *Sexuality and Black Church*, "If who we are – that is, our life experiences – helps us to determine our theological questions and concerns, then who we are also circumscribes those questions and concerns. Our particular social, historical, cultural, and political actualities can free us to address certain topics, and at other times, those very same actualities can hinder us from doing so."[1]

At the point of desperation, the musings of Aretha Franklin and the hymnodies of Mahalia Jackson join at the hip - birthed from the same womb, raised with the same air, justified by the same experience. Therefore, it behooves all who endure these sounds to observe their joint histories as they provide clarity in setting forth notions of spirituality and dismantling a ruling dichotomy of separation.

It is indeed the desperation of Black people that produced the sorrow songs and the blues. The desperation of Black people summoned the gospel songs and the rhythmic blues we enjoy in the public sphere. The desperation of Black people delivered unto us 50 years of Hip Hop as well as the Hymns of the old church. Their differences lie between misinformed theological

[1] Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999, 5.

constructions handed down from American enslavers who sought to silence the desperation Black people sang about. And yet, the powers that be would have us believe and adhere to inconsistent theological constructs rooted in hatred, malice, and injustice.

Suppose Black Christians became similarly aware enough of the plight to dismantle our religious power through recognition of our likeness and not our differences. In that case, we might encourage a long-lasting relationship with the future of our people through the sacred institution we call "The Black Church" - a breeding ground for separation ideals on the matter. Perhaps we might do well to envision our mothers and fathers who visited the nightclubs on Saturday nights and woke up early Sunday morning to attend church service the next day. There is an exciting relationship between the days of the weekend that encapsulates the totality of the Black American experience. However, we must be careful not to eliminate relationships to one space over the other because both of them serve a socio-spiritual purpose for healing people in need of relief from varying degrees of desperation.

Theological Justifications

Might we employ conversations on Black Liberation and Theology from James H. Cone and the current works of Kelly Brown Douglas? Both Cone and Douglas offer us poignant observations on how we might employ useful theologies around the topics of Sacred and Secular music and the relationship between the two. While one Black church tradition is not to blame for positing entire misreadings of sacred text/practices, a careful review of some Black church traditions, sacraments, and embodied regulations for engaging the world around might lead us to reconsider theologies of holiness, sacredness, purity culture, the ritual of baptism, and notions of revival to name a few.

In Douglas's *Black Bodies and Black Church: A Blues Slant* - a text on the synonymous sacredness of blues song-singing and religious experiences from the Black preacher's perspective - the Black preacher is examined as one with blues, or one with something worth expressing, from a deep place of need, much like the blues musician. Whether it be the need to celebrate joyfully or weep tears of sorrow, the point of despair is the impetus for generating the preacher's response. Likewise, in many of Cone's writings, namely *God of the Oppressed*, God is Black. Why? For Cone, God is only innately God if God identifies with the oppressed in society. It is at the point of great need, hopelessness, and desperation that Cone's God is identifiable. What use does God have if God is not one to "heal the sick, mend the broken, and set the captive free?"

James Baldwin adds in his groundbreaking novel *The Fire Next Time*, "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him."[2] At base, if God is not interested in the work of liberation, justice, truth, and love, then perhaps our use for the concept of God has outdated itself. Indeed, corporate thieves, capitalist worshippers, institutional bigots, and purveyors of justice are not concerned about the punishment for unrighteousness. Likewise, an overreliance on the afterlife as a ploy to scare people into righteousness is not a solution. But in the here and now, an emphasis on the God of justice, peace, unity, and love might do better for us than one who emphasizes harm on either side.

The False Dichotomy: The Religion of Secular Music

"What then shall we do with Jesus?" is a question once asked by the biblical character Pilot to a mob of Jews in Jesus' famous trial on the way to crucifixion. Let us reassign the

[2] Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage, 2013, 47.

question for today, contrary to popular belief, should any damnable meaning be placed on religious (Jesus) experiences that happen outside of the church - of course, with the fundamental assumption that religious experiences should happen outside of church often (Jesus being the prime example of this in the Gospels). Could it be that a sense of spiritual expression, experience, and enchantment can happen outside of the church, empowered by the God of truth, justice, peace, liberation, and love? "The roots of African American religion run deep on the African continent. The human beings trapped in the nightmare of the transatlantic slave trade practiced a wide variety of religions, including traditional ancestral worship,"[3] says Henry Louis Gates in his documentary text *The Black Church*.

I'm afraid this question has haunted many Black Christians for years because it leads one to wonder what significance their salvation/conversion experience has/had on them if nothing intrinsically happened when they walked down the aisle in a church during the ritual of the alter call. Did you/we need a church to get "saved" to "know Jesus?" And no one dares to resolve that their religious conversion experience was merely an emotion conjured through imagination to make meaning of a moment in church, by walking down the aisle simply because the man in the pulpit said this was your moment and shortly after, asked you for some money, right?

As the old song says, "Tell me how did you feel when you came out of the wilderness." How did you feel when you got "saved"? What did you feel? Did you feel a sense of change? Was there an emotional outcry? Did you feel butterflies in your stomach? Likewise, what about when you heard your favorite Aretha record, like the high note she belts in "Never Loved a Man" or Sam Cooke's "A Change Gonna Come?" Nina Simone's "Young, Gifted, and Black" or

[3] Gates, Henry Louis. *The BlackBlack Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song*. New York: Penguin Press, 2021, 21.

Donny Hathway's version? Whitney Houston's rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner?" How about Jennifer Hudson's arrangement of "I Ain't Going" or Fantasia's delivery of "I'm Here (from *The Color Purple*)?

If you felt anything, what you felt was a spiritual synergetic power that taps at the root nerve of the cry of your ancestry, a legacy of the Black experience generated by the need to be free. Each of these songs likewise borrows from that which produced the hymn, the sorrow song, and the spiritual with despair at the root. In the Black experience, the point of the need to write ourselves into our own liberation gives us the power to pen such beautiful music. The feelings we feel about both the sacred and secular are not vague. They are clear! Why? Because they come from the same place. Despair. So what shall we do with Jesus, you may ask? Look for him in both the sacred and the secular.

No Room In the Inn - Space for the Culture

The genius of African-American religion cannot be encapsulated. Many scholars and creatives have attempted to define the experience of Black people's spirituality, but here we argue that its genius is undefinable and cannot be categorized. Particularly when considering how Black religion and spirituality have historically been generated by way of intense pressure, vulnerability, and desperation, Black religion is a phenomenon indescribable in its totality. In light of this thought, social pressure, racial vulnerability, and economic despair are necessary tenants that generate the type of spiritual experiences Black folk have even in today's religious climate. They have also historically been associated with Black American religion's phenomenal genius and engenderment. Scholars like Albert Raboutou mention hush harbors, ring shouting, and hymn lining as important pieces of the fabric weaved together to form the African-American Christian experience in particular. One might argue that slaves did not intend to birth such a

long-lasting phenomenal institution - what we now know as the Black church - but it is certainly the product of their struggle to thrive in America. At the least, we can assert that they understood the necessity for space and space-making for themselves and those who shared similar experiences of racial oppression in America.

Therefore, sacred space and space-making, along with inclusion and affirmation within religious experiences are important in any conversation about Black folk. Whether we choose to identify religiously or not, the origins of our history in America cannot be expressed without a conversation about Black religious spaces, and more particularly, the Black church. Black churches sit on the front row of culture, from music and art to fashion and film, education, politics, and business. Black churches themselves do not hold a monopoly on the Black experience, but they must be included in a universal conversation about the Black experience in America. Even the institutions that shared a historical hand in the advancement of Black people in America from various vantage points must acknowledge their affiliations with Black churches in general. For example, The NAACP was undoubtedly closely aligned with Black churches through collaborative protesting efforts of the 1950s, the Nation of Islam's founder was born Baptist, HBCUs were historically funded and founded by Black churches, and the civil rights movement's leadership was primarily comprised of Black preachers whom otherwise might be considered revivalists on local church circuits if not for the organization of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Likewise, the music we listen to in the here and now derived from such movements and developed from Black churches' hand-clapping, foot-stomping wooden floors. Wherever there was an opportunity for Black folks in America to advance beyond spiritual settings, Black churches were included in the discourse as a fundamental institution for social progress.

To further ground this survey, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya's definition of Black Churches situates our conversation in a way that highlights the seven denominations of Black history, "independent, historic, and Black controlled….which were founded after the Free African Society of 1787 and which constituted the core of Black Christians."[4] Though Black churches specifically provided tools for the faith formation of Black Christians, their impact and relatable influence on popular culture gave birth to the sounds and renderings of Little Richard, Otis Redding, Stevie Wonder, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, and Quincy Jones to name a few. The space provided by Black churches to cultivate such sounds from the artists above in the face of racism and oppression extends far beyond the churches themselves. Still, it has made an indelible impression on the success and longevity of Black creative art for centuries and continues to maintain its mark on society. As a result, popular music, popular culture, and popular media would not be what they are without its participant's growth and development in Black churches. "No Room In the Inn," as a biblical reference to the birth of Jesus and Mary's inability to secure a place to deliver him, suggests that we must take the idea of space seriously in conversations about Blackness, Black churches, and the historical Black experience in America. There were no spaces for Black folk, so the church became the centering hub for all Black life.

For example, the lineage of a vocalist such as Whitney Houston, arguably one of the most influential pop artists of the 20th and 21st centuries, must include the likes of Aretha Franklin, whose artistry was closely developed by James Cleveland and her father, Rev. C.L. Franklin, a Baptist preacher whose reign situated him at the top of the revival circuit from the

[4] Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Religious Dimension: Toward a Sociology of Black Churches." *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Duke University Press, 1990, 1.

mid-1940s to the late 70s. More importantly, his close affiliation with Clara Ward and the Clara Ward singers enhanced the visibility of Black singers in general and collectively gave birth to the reimagined popular genre known as modern Rhythm and Blues from the 1970s. Without these essential stakeholders in the formation of African-American music, what we understand as the foundation of our experience would not exist. Therefore, how can we draw historical connections to these founding pillars of American culture that honor them and encourage the continuation of our art and influence in the here and now?

Spiritual Space-Making

A general definition of the word space might point us to consider the shaping of buildings, structures, and landmass constructions toward a particular end. One may consider building a school. In this case, a developer would have to include classroom measurements for learning, a cafeteria for eating, a gymnasium for indoor recreation, and outdoor field space for children to engage themselves and each other in recreational sporting activities. For a church, a pastor and/or contractor might lead the congregation to think about sanctuaries/spaces for worship, fellowship halls for dining, office space for administration, and any additional things that a congregation's budget can manage to maintain the community efforts of the institution. These concepts are general ideas around space-shaping/building that specifically cater to the needs and functions of particular institutions and communities, including the aforementioned. However, “space-making” might encourage us to take what happens within institutions beyond just the formation of buildings seriously. Church buildings themselves do not regulate a supposed function. For instance, many churches post-pandemic have found multiple uses for their sanctuaries beyond sacred worship because their leaders recognize the adaptability of square footage and the ability to mobilize seating in sanctuaries - which provides opportunities to

convert sanctuaries into spaces that function like fellowship halls. Yes, buildings can function as intended and also serve the supposed transformative intentions of the institution. Still, now the question is, if space is not limited to its intended functions, how can we ensure the space theoretically makes room for all who enter or inhabit? What ought we do with space, and how should we use space to make space? Perhaps we could look to African ancestry to employ the purpose of Black church developments and borrow their intentions for space-making pre-1865.

Using Ashon Crawley's idea of "Otherwise Possibilities," let's expound on the theoretical notion of space-making. What does it mean to make space? For who? Suppose we contextualized our understanding of space-making and identified oppressed/marginalized groups as targets for whom space should be made, as was created during slavery for enslaved people. In that case, it's probably best to further concretize and situate our pool of communities to focus on. For instance, let's think specifically about the inclusion of women and queer folk in African American churches (the Black church) as groups for whom space should be made. "Whereas there is a diversity of African American religious views on some social issues, such as women in ministry, social activism, evangelism, and interpretation of scripture, in the area of sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, Black congregants do not show much variance,"[5] says Horace Griffin in his thought-provoking work *Their Own Receive Them Not.*

Crawley's definition suggests that "Otherwise" as an idea points to an embodied action, a way of being in and out of one's body. The definition further asserts that churches are meant to

[5] Griffin, Horace, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*. Pilgrim Press, 2006, 6.

foster inclusion at the base. “Otherwise” describes a place the oppressed can enter to embody a liberation that allows the manifestation of realities not yet imagined in the present.

In his text, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, Ashon Crawley uses two forms of ritual aesthetic practice to describe ways Black folk resist oppression. They include “noise” and “breath.” For Crawley, alternative realms of existence are made possible in the here and now through these embodied practices. His first description comes to us by way of “breath.” Crawley says, “To breathe, within this western theological-philosophical epistemology, from within the zone of Blackness, from within the zone of Blackpentecostalism, is to offer a critical performative intervention into the western juridical apparatus of violent control, repression, and yes, premature death.” [6]

Crawley’s excerpt argues for a fascination with imagining how Black people develop resistance methods to oppression. For Crawley, the queer Black (usually male) church singer, and many others in Black churches (somehow, beyond the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, into the new century), including women and LGBTQ folk, are still being excluded from leadership opportunities in Black churches while using their gifts to promote the missions and visions of these churches, as these marginalized groups make up the majority of Black churches. With the intentions of movements like Black Lives Matter present, how can exclusion based on gender and sexuality in Black churches hold true to such ignorance when these churches developed by protests were made without the need to justify any social identities to the powers that be? If Black churches are to uphold their foundational intent, they must be willing to include

6 Ashon T. Crawley. *Blackpentecostal Breath : The Aesthetics of Possibility.* American Literatures Initiative, 2017, 34.

marginalized communities within their context by definition. Beyond that, not by definition alone, but on principles of love, liberation, and joy in the human experience.

Examples of Public Figures Who Defy Space

Beyonce's Renaissance - A Spiritual Gathering

Perhaps we can think about legacies of space-making that include linkages between Aretha Franklin's artistry and Beyoncé Knowles. Beyoncé has arguably catapulted to become one of the highest-selling artists ever. She currently holds the record for most Grammys won by a single female artist in history, and her album sales have peaked and swept across number-one billboard chart-topping reports for several decades. She has also consistently maintained a brand that upholds a standard of excellence and stimulates economic opportunity and revenue for those who participate in her artistry and the Beyonce machine, better known as the Beyhive. What is most fantastic about Beyoncé's work, along with Aretha Franklin's historic work, is that they are both individually and collectively tailored and fashioned by the institutionalized African-American church experience. They are both products of Gospel singing mothers of the genre like Marion Williams, Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward and the Clara Ward Singers, Ruth Davis and Davis Sisters, The Barrett Sisters, the Gospel Caravans and Shirley Caesar, and so many other gospel women of history. Beyonce is the spiritual daughter of Pastor Rudy Rasmus, a United Methodist minister and former pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in Downtown Houston, TX - a predominantly Black congregation. Aretha Franklin is the daughter of the legendary Baptist minister, C.L. Franklin.

The artistry in their music intersects with the works of many who came before them and likewise honors those traditions. Furthermore, paying homage for example, Beyoncé's most

recent work makes space for the influence and recognition of the world-renowned Gospel group, The Clark Sisters. The Clark Sisters have also made an indelible imprint on the fabric of American popular music and have been making that impact since the early 1970s and 80s. Their music alone has allowed them to curate space and opportunity for artists who borrow from their sound, sonically bridging the gap between secular and sacred genres like gospel artist Donald Lawrence (former music director for Stephanie Mills). Beyoncé's most recent album, *Renaissance*, includes a song entitled "Church Girl," which features a sample from the Clark Sisters' "Center of Thy Will." Therefore, one could argue the space Beyoncé made on tour and on records borrows from sounds developed in the Church of God In Christ but extends far beyond the church itself.

In addition, while the Church of God In Christ has not historically vocalized affirming support for LGBTQ issues, Beyoncé's *Renaissance* is undoubtedly a work of art that was dedicated to her queer Uncle Johnny, whom she recognizes several times throughout the entirety of the project. She claims he was the man who encouraged her to go forward into her artistry boldly and creatively, not wasting time allowing herself to be trapped by anyone's opinions or negative thoughts about who she was and what she could do creatively. It was that seed from a queer relative sewn into her that allowed her to step out and become the icon she is. Now the responsibility is on Beyoncé to build and create spaces for other queer folks in homage to her uncle and gospel music, which she's done quite successfully throughout her tour. People worldwide have commented about the deliberative, resistive, creative elements of her work on the Renaissance tour, her efforts to bridge the cultural phenomenon known as House music, the historic connection she has to R&B/Soul, and her gospel roots into one show.

Making space for everyone involved, with her tour, Beyoncé has pushed the limits and boundaries of space and, like many artists, called for acceptance of the marginalized, the underrepresented, and those without a space traditionally made for them. Might her efforts link back to the origins of the Black church itself? Space for the underrepresented, the marginalized, and those who were traditionally not accepted in exclusive spaces. Were not Black people in need of space as enslaved people in the antebellum South and free Black folks in the North, looking for opportunities to grow economically and to become citizens in the United States of America? Is it not our responsibility to do the same with our spaces in the here and now? If we are charged and challenged with the responsibility to make space for those without space but have not, then what use is space itself? Beyonce's *Renaissance Tour* was indeed a church service for the marginalized.

Coltrane or Kanye? Or Both?

Kanye West is arguably one of the most influential creatives of our time. He has crossed the boundaries of several musical genres, produced top-selling albums, creative content in the music, fashion, and film industries, and maintained a creative quality of production beyond the mundane. In its humble beginnings, as seen in the Netflix Mini-Series *Jeen-Yuhs*, Kanye's artistry grew out of the need to hear an enhanced, developed hip-hop musical sound that spoke not only to the realities of Black people in a particular region or from a specific experience, but to include a collective observation of his entire milieu. For this, Kanye is indeed a space-maker.

Likewise, Coltrane is arguably a spiritualist in his own right. He is a reported mystical creative whose work encompasses informational downloads from an identified Holy Spirit. It is said that in one of Coltrane's most notable works, he consulted the holy for several weeks in the attic of his home to construct the exact metrics of sound and musical composition, the music that

we now call *A Love Supreme*. Prophetic in nature and progressive for the genre known as Jazz, Coltrane's relentless spiritual commitment to the work of God supplants and undergirds this body of work as the genius art it is and is recognized as in popular culture. What's more complex about the work and the artistry of Coltrane is his relentless commitment to a liberation ethic at the height of the Harlem Rennasaince while also actively uplifting and breaking down the barriers and limitations of space for great art, rejecting many of the ones who benefit from predominantly white space - an embodied liberationist sermonic-sonic of sorts. Contrane's music alone generated space for Black people in and out of predominately white spaces worldwide. In his book, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World*, the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III writes, "The preaching I heard as a boy and studied as an adult was not confirmed or ratified by seminaries or western gatekeepers. The preaching I witnessed danced with Lorraine Hansberry, did sets with John Coltrane, flowed with Maya Angelou, and was inspired by Langston Hughes."[7]

Is Kanye a reimagined Coltrane? What, then, can we say about Kanye West and his influence on popular culture? Well, one must be willing to accept the notion that Kanye is recognized as a social rebel with a struggle to maintain his mental health. In contrast, others might argue he is a liberationist like Coltrane. Unlike others, Coltrane's public appeal did not extend beyond his music. The media embraced him as a family-oriented African American whose passion was rooted in the music he made.

Furthermore, as a liberationist, the genius of Kanye West is not limited to the music he produced in hip-hop but has also extended into the widespread space-making efforts he made for young Christians in his genre-bending choir production known as the Sunday Service. On

[7] Moss III, Otis. *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, xII.

January 6, 2019, without intentions to be recognized, musicians, creatives, artists, and local talent traveled from all over to Calabasas, CA, to flock to an innovative worship encounter hosted by the rapper himself. The Sunday service choir was born as a musical instrument to foster community among young musicians in the entertainment industry with church backgrounds, led by Jason White, former music director for Bishop Carlton Pearson and many gospel legends.

This space was arguably a genius creation because Kanye recognized the need for worship to happen outside of the four walls of the church, therefore grounding the experience of the Sunday service outdoors on a California hill and mandating that everybody who participates wear all white. The first service featured various samples of popular gospel songs and remixes, including that of artists like Fred Hammond. Kanye later produced an album version recording of all of the songs that the Sunday Service Choir has remixed, and it alone out-sold every gospel album that year. The album became number one on the Billboard charts and broke records similar to the years that Kanye climbed the Billboard charts in the early 2000s with the hit song "Jesus Walks."

For Coltrane, Space-making seemed safe, but the modern/popular appeal of Jazz music to the public eye was not an aggressive challenge to the status quo. However, in those days, performance in public anywhere for Black artists was resistance. Stories about musical acts like Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday being rejected from white establishments, which led to the curation of Chitlin Circuit performances, reigned true for even John Coltrane. As a musician trained in the style of Miles Davis, Coltrane was not exempt from the struggle for Civil Rights. However, choosing to play against the odds of society eventually made space for all who came after him.

Kanye's ability to gather people of all nations and to emphasize the importance of space while amid a moment and an international crisis known as the global pandemic of 2020 was more than an effort to be seen and heard but it maintained a lasting impact for many folks and many churches across the nation. In his work *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said suggests, "Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority."[8] Kanye's work even pushed him to connect with some of the largest churches in the African diaspora of the United States, including New Birth Missionary Baptist Church led by Dr. Jamal Harrison Bryant, and churches not included in the African diaspora like Lakewood Church, pastored by the famous televangelist Joel Osteen. Although he is understood as a controversial media figure, his efforts to create space alternatively beyond the four walls of the church cannot go unnoticed. He has maintained a lasting impact on culture through music but is also an exemplary pioneer of space-making for spirituality and religious expression in the African-American experience.

Space Made in the Pandemic

The 2020 global pandemic forced churches across the United States to connect virtually with congregants to maintain membership and community engagement. Many churches were forced to consider their budgets, parishioner retentions, legacies, and the inevitable changes of the future. With uncertainty, church leaders and congregants naturally wondered whether the God they believed in would bring them through the pandemic. As a result, pastors suffered under the pressures of uncertainty, believing God for their ministries futures. Many American churches

[8] Said, E. *Representations of the Intellectual*. Vintage Books, 1996, 6.

collapsed under the pressure of the Pandemic, and Black churches were no exception. In other ways, the churches that were prepared to move ahead of the curve received tremendous support from churchgoers who joined from other communities, cities, and even states because of their access to technology, which concretized the significance of intentional virtual ministry.

Furthermore, the concept of a church founded on the internet, whose only engagement is strictly virtual, was something to be imagined, but not yet actualized. There were no blueprints for the ways to conduct ministry online successfully. These are the beginning circumstances and experiences of the UNDRGRND Church – A Virtual Community of Faith.

Founded on May 17, 2020, a select few scholars, students, artists, ministers, and supporters came together for a pilot worship service, streaming on Zoom and Facebook. The result was a success! In its first year, UNDRGRND grew its private membership group to 100 people and established a database of over 200 contacts. The general make-up of attendees included but was not limited to students of all sectors (graduate, undergraduate, professional, faculty) as well as thought-provoking churchgoers who were interested in challenging their ordinary religious/church experiences. These numbers are reflective of the church's membership status, until its concluding virtual service on January 21, 2023. UNDRGRND Inc. was established under a metaphorical idea of "safety underground" taken from New Testament observations in the writings of Paul. During a graduate study trip to Greece and Turkey studying the New Testament at Harvard Divinity School, a significant truth was uncovered relative to the religious experience of Black Christians in America today. That is, the church in the New Testament, as well as in the antebellum South during slavery, was a place for folks to seek refuge amid political danger and uncertainty. UNDRGRND sought to represent a place of safety and security (virtually) in the same ways during socio-political uncertainty, as seen in the global

pandemic of 2020. UNDRGRND Inc. received 501©3 non-profit status in Georgia and engaged in communal work by donating funding to non-profits and individuals needing financial assistance each week.

The mission and vision of UNDRGRND Church was to build a virtual community of faith that actively ministered in the direction of those who are traditionally and religiously disinherited. This means UNDRGRND, as a ministry, sought to serve people who do not engage or have become disconnected from their Christian upbringing for various reasons. The model of ministry could be considered anti-traditional. Still, in many ways, it maintained the traditions of Christian churches while adhering to ritual adjustments in styles and performance during the worship hour. For example, instead of raising a traditional choir song written and performed by John P. Kee, our community raised "I'm Here" from The Color Purple – performed by Fantasia Barrino. The reason for this shift is because there are motions and movements within her performance that do not only entertain the audience around her but evoke a spiritual *conjure* that takes listeners on a journey – an evocation identified likewise as the Holy Spirit. The commitment to minister in these ways and formats made the ministry even more unique beyond the fact that the community was strictly virtual.

UNDRGRND believed that the hope that lived in the institution's future depended on its ability to consistently reimagine its community, context, and commitments. Often, the problem that hinders this future of hope in American churches, particularly, is the institution's inability to recognize what relevant ministry looks like in today's world – a world that's happening and not a reflection of a previous day. UNDRGRND understood that the institution would need to address its position in the world and its purpose in serving people in the present. If churches are not active centers of healing and hope but instead centers of exclusion and secrecy, their essence is

reduced to a simple gathering and not action towards liberation. African-American Churches' survival is contingent upon their ability to service the oppressed, adapt to cultural change, and employ a theology of "welcome"[9] over exclusion.

As a child, I observed the leadership of my grandfather, a Pastor in the city of Atlanta (discussed in the Ministerial Competencies section). I enjoyed things about his leadership and habits I might engage differently if given the opportunity. Along with those experiences, my education at Morehouse College and Harvard University helped me to imagine the kind of church I wanted to attend growing up, one that would bring back many of the people who also left. When UNDRGRND Church was established, the hope was that it would create a safe space for anyone with access to phone technology or the internet in need of a spiritual community due to churches' uncertainty around the Pandemic. Instead, founded on the principle of building an active community serving oppressed groups through virtual gatherings and giving efforts, UNDRGRND became a community of healing for any clergy, layperson, non-Christian, non-religious, atheists, queer, disenfranchised, apolitical, and other oppressed community members overserved in the United States. The future hope was that the church would expand its reach to develop multiple small groups in cities across America.

While many other ministries depend on their parishioners' total participation, economic investment, and sustainability, UNDRGRND's model was built differently. Its primary focus was active service to oppressed communities spiritually, socially, and economically. Every amount of money collected was repurposed and given to a community or individual who needs financial

[9] Welcome – a willingness to listen openly, with understanding and empathy to everyone who comes to UNDRGRND.

assistance each week. We purchased laptops, supported organizations like Mothers Against Police Brutality, and donated to COVID-19 Relief efforts. Our community's philosophies opposed the idea that the church's survival is contingent upon the tithes and offerings of the people. As COVID-19 transformed how companies and small businesses operated, African-American churches were likewise affected. Recognizing and adapting to the context and the power of the internet was a major goal of UNDRGRND Church.

UNDRGRND's primary difference from local churches with a virtual platform was its private gathering order of worship and funding model. The funding model was most important because it explicitly targeted companies and organizations looking to support other non-profits, therefore taking the pressure off parishioners to maintain the institution. By establishing an endowment, the idea is that the church would run on its economic value, and its service to the community would continue whether people decide to attend/give or not. The idea of an endowment came from serving at the Memorial Church of Harvard University. As a student, I discovered the funding model of educational institutions and their subsidiaries. I realized that the money collected on the floor during gatherings/worship services was distributed to surrounding non-profit organizations voted on by a grants committee. The university's endowment supported the daily operations, payrolls, services, and expenses. This ideal would save pastors from losing employment, traditionally supported by tithes and offerings in churches across the world.

Secondly, inclusion on all fronts remained at the forefront of conversation and discussion. The community was diverse, with a predominant base in Black culture. Black, Asian, White, Native American, Queer, Straight, Men, Women, Children, Christian, Atheist, Non-religious, Pentecostal, Conservative, and people of all different backgrounds are welcome at UNDRGRND and have attended our gatherings. We believed that our strength was in a broad array of

experiences and that by sharing our stories, we grew and connect at the most fundamental parts of our being, our humanity. By maintaining a standard of respect for the sacred dignity of all people, we actively rejected exclusion and embraced a welcome attitude.

While raised as a Black Baptist/charismatic Christian in Atlanta, Georgia, the fundamentals of my religious worldview are shaped by those experiences. Therefore, the "Order of Service" at UNDRGRND reflected that. It was based on what is known and often experienced in charismatic Baptist churches, a move of the holy spirit. First, we gently welcomed everyone to the space, acknowledging everyone's presence, and began a Mantra. Afterward, we shared announcements, read our mission and vision statement, and previewed the order of worship. Once we'd concluded the service with singing, prayer, and a sermon, we offered a benediction. Then, we offered a post-service conversation, a chance for the entire group to engage discussion on a popular culture topic or sermon talkback. This program was designed to sustain the attention span of visitors on the internet, as we would often be met with opportunities for distraction. During the service, I served as the congregational leader and preacher. Participants were given the chance to log on to services live or watch a restream through YouTube. During the live and post-live services, they could use the chat to communicate with me as I actively monitored the chat feed. If they were so led, attendees can unmute themselves to speak, respond, and make particular requests as they saw fit. However, there were boundaries set in place if one might have chosen to be disruptive, like during the sermonic moment or blatantly disrespect another person's contribution in service through word, song, or moment of leadership engagement (rituals, preaching, leading the mantra, etc.), offering unnecessary commentary.

Lastly, our Theology of welcome allowed folks to introduce themselves to the space before the space defined who they were concerning everyone else. In this way, we found that

judgment was not the first interpretation of a first-time visitor's interactions, but embracement and honor for their presence and existence, which were always expressed initially. For Black churches to survive beyond the COVID era, we must intentionally welcome the outsider, the stranger, “the gentile”, the one that comes from another place. Failure to embrace the outsider is a failure to adopt a reflection of God.

At UNDRGRND, we activated intentional practices that uplifted the voices of the oppressed through call-and-response chanting, Christian education discussions (intentionally grounded in what we believe to be the practices of Jesus Christ), and intercommunal networking through social media. Our prime time for discussion, called Parking Lot, happened immediately after service following worship and the sermon. Lead by our volunteer Minister for Christian Education, Parking Lot conversations took multiple forms including guest lectures and sermon talkbacks. The most notable format was usually a group discussion about a current event or popular research topics in the humanities like Justice in America, political campaigns, Poetic activism of the 20th century, art and literature, and biblical exegesis.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has affected all of our lives together. For the first time in this current generations experience, no one was exempt from the tragedies of an illness, balancing the moral playing field in many ways. Furthermore, it reminded us that nothing is permanent. Instead of holding on to traditions and practices that no longer serve well, it taught us to embrace a new way of connecting, virtually. Likewise, discovering a new method for social inclusion will help keep the church responsible for its collective actions and advance it into a new relevant future. Otherwise, more institutions could collapse. I love the sacred traditions of the church and the institution, but not at the expense of people. My sociological roots are in the institution – which is the reason for my investment. Therefore, I believe that finding a way forward will serve

the church and its purposes well if we dedicate ourselves to discovering how we can develop proactive theological commitments to social inclusion?

UNDRGRND's goals were rooted in the practice of inclusion, service to the oppressed, and a liberation theology, through teaching and action. While we sought to develop the communal life of a person, we also hoped to liberate the mind so they may serve others. Likewise, we were intentional with how we talked about God and each other. Our language in sermons and prayers was specific and focused on speaking against previous church pains and traumas. UNDRGRND aimed to model the modern church for the future of all churches. Inspired by the work of the Black Panther Party, the Civil Rights Movement, and Black churches across America from 1867 to the present, UNDRGND hoped to revolutionize the church as a way forward. In the same ways, Bell Hooks hoped to revolutionize education. "Concurrently, feminist challenges to patriarchy and its concomitant insistence on the primacy of male thinkers and their works was an insurrection that created major changes. When a critique of race and class was added to that of gender, every bias was interrogated. To progressive teachers and students this was truly a revolution, making it possible for many of us to enter areas of study that were previously seen as arenas available solely to privileged white males,"[10] says Hooks. Inspired by Hooks, three continuous themes of UNDRGRND include responding to COVID-19, economic and social inclusion, and Theology construction.

During the pandemic, the work of American churches strictly depended on their ability to think beyond the boxes to maintain virtual connections. Now that the pandemic effects have lessened and the world continues to search for life before 2020, hybrid models of ministry have

[10] Hooks, Bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, Routledge, 2009, 24.

come forth. Those who desire to be in buildings have taken full advantage of the space and properties that belong to their churches while others who'd instead engage virtually remain at home on Sundays. One of the challenges of UNDRGRND's future was deciding whether we would stay a cloud-based ministry (only virtual engagement) or plant in a local community to further substantiate our ministry on the ground. Though services have paused, UNDRGRND is in a phase of discernment about the best ways to engage its future ministry endeavors.

Space Made for Justice

The Reverend Al Sharpton is one of the nation's leading social activists in politics, social justice, and spirituality. His efforts have advanced and maintained the standard of work done throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s led by revered leaders such as Rev. Jesse Jackson and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Reverend Sharpton's project called the National Action Network is not a church, but to some, it can be and has been considered an alternative worship space, particularly for many Black Christians living in the center of the historic Harlem, New York. The tenets of the National Action Network's organization uphold social justice as a standard of living and a reason to exist beyond what most Black churches in America vocalize consistently: the liberation of Black folk. There are very few Black churches in America that actively combat racism, discrimination, and social injustice. In the same ways that the National Action Network believes they are called to do work as an alternative space, like UNDRGRND, Rev. Sharpton holds a weekly gathering on Saturday mornings at 9 AM, much like the format of a Seven-day Adventist church, which also meets on Saturdays.

During this gathering, participants engage the headquarters of the National Action Network as if they were in a Black Baptist church. There is gospel song-singing, praise and

worship, prophetic declarations, admonishments, and congregational activity that resembles a worship service format in any Black church. The spirit of God is often called and summoned into the space to aid their belief that the work cannot be done without the spirit of God. They can be considered worship encounters for many Black Christians and a base for many churchgoers who find themselves spiritually grounded in the work of the national action networks beyond the work of the local Black church.

Dissertation Structure

This work, in its entirety, will survey the following in a complete, synonymous format. Chapters 2-6 are briefly described below:

Chapter 2 will highlight the significant social justice achievements of the Rev. Alfred Sharpton. This chapter will likewise uplift the importance of his relationship with one of the greatest entertainers of American history, James Brown. Through conversation, his testimonials will offer insight into their mentor/mentee interactions, their valuable friendship, and the legacy James Brown left behind to Rev. Al Sharpton.

Chapter 3 emphasizes a collection of Ministerial Competencies I observe as a practitioner in the Christian faith. First, I will offer an overview of this work's theoretical journey to the terms Pentecostal and Pentecostalism. After a brief history, I will advance the term to represent a style for engaging the holy and creative art toward an end of liberation and joy. I will then connect my theological commitments to this work by alignment this work and my ministry to four Ministerial competencies. I write about the following competencies: Theologian, Worship Leader, Prophet, and Technology leader.

Chapter 4 is an overview of the Methods chosen to undergo the necessary research procedures to complete this work. The methods chosen are both Historical and Qualitative methodologies. This chapter will center the following questions as guideposts for reflection: Why interviews? Why was this particular sample chosen to conduct research? How is the data collection being analyzed, and what metrics are in place to concretize the findings? What Theoretical Frameworks are used to supply reasoning and purpose for the findings?

Chapter 5 will be a complete summary of findings and a condensed version of interview materials. The conversations will highlight themes of Creative Arts Backgrounds, Euphoria, and Liberation. These findings dispel myths of Sacred vs. Secular music, explore Black Church Foundations and traditions for creatives engaged in Black musical arts rooted in gospel music, and engage the abundant pathways to Liberation through the Arts.

Chapter 6 will comprehensively examine the evidence, process, and procedure to find a Conclusion. In short, the conclusion will argue that black music should not be demonized by its characteristics or differences, but rather recognized as creations of the divine. The conclusion will also highlight the limitations of the study and the implications of debunking the false dichotomy.

Chapter 2: Lessons from Social Justice Leader Rev. Al Sharpton

This chapter explores how my Religious Practitioner - Rev. Al Sharpton - interfaces with conversations on James Brown, Funk Music, Black church, and Social Justice. Within the context of this chapter, specific recollections about Rev. Sharpton and the memory of James Brown as a mentor, friend, father, and boss bring about thoughts that aid in dismantling the false dichotomy of the sacred and the secular. Examples of times they shared, significant life-changing occurrences, and impactful activist efforts arise as themes of the chapter.

This chapter also explores how future ministry practitioners can find their voices in the fight for progressive theology, justice, and inclusion. The chapter concludes with a brief retelling of the story of Rev Sharpton and his charge to future ministers engaged in the fight for equality, justice, and liberation, particularly within the context of Black churches. The following themes are listed as subheadings for chapter 2: Class Discussion, Fatherhood in Black America, Al Sharpton and James Brown, and the Legacy of Rev. Sharpton.

"When you think about it, there is no logical reason in the world for James Brown, as big as he is, to be that close to a boy preacher from Brooklyn, New York, who couldn't do anything for him. It just doesn't make sense. If he had not been in my life, I probably would have been an imitation of older civil rights leaders. James Brown taught me to be me! And that's what God needed." These were the words that linger to this day from our impactful conversation. This

quotation is exemplary of divine intervention in the life and legacy of the work of The Rev. Alfred Charles Sharpton. His relationship to the world-renowned James Brown made no logical sense. His connection to the legacy of James Brown is one that many others thought they might be better suited for. The lasting impact that Brown's work has on Rev. Sharpton is etched into the fabric of his identity forever. For clarity, I'll assert that the Al Sharpton the world now knows was crafted, inspired by, and born out of mentorship of the "biggest" Black performing artist of the time, James Brown. Furthermore, his lasting influence can be seen in a visual representation to date, even down to Sharpton's hairstyle and regular television attire.

In August of 2022, I had the pleasure of connecting with Rev. Al Sharpton, one of America's most prominent civil rights leaders and advocates for the Black experience in society. During our conversation, he offered many profound tips on how he engaged in activist efforts as an aspiring civil rights leader in his youth, which allowed him to advance in the public sphere as a prophetic voice for his people. Often criticized for some of the choices he made as a religious leader and activist during public appearances on national television and syndicated radio shows, he assured me that his efforts were purely strategic. The caricature made of him was intended to distract from the true essence of his message: justice for all! At the center of his activism was an emphasis on his experience as an African American. Though the general public imagined him as a villain in society, agitating an unstable status quo, he became a public hero with the support of many mentors, including the Rev. William Augustus Jones (his childhood Pastor), the Rev. Jesse Jackson (his teacher), and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (his inspiration). However, none of those prolific figures of history compare to the influence of the biggest Pop star at the time, James Brown (the Father he never had).

In conversation with the Rev., I raised questions around his life experiences as a leader, moments of growth, and reflections on what some might consider failures, but also the long-lasting relationship he developed over many years with the Godfather of Soul. I was personally and professionally intrigued by the advice he received from James Brown. His admiration for James Brown's creativity, genius, and commitment to excellence lit a spark that motivated me to complete this work. After watching the interview and transcribing the words, I had to complete the job. I realized I had been challenged to tell this incredible story. It became one of the highest honors of my life to expound on such a profound relationship, so delicate and necessary for the history of our people.

What further motivated me was his transparency during our conversation. It is not often that a prominent leader of history will share their triumphs and their tragedies. Rev. Sharpton embodied a sense of vulnerability at the heart of a young Black preacher's experience. He knew the life. He knows the struggle. He saw what it took to become great. However, he did not allow his experiences or limitations to hinder his progress. He encouraged me to do the same. Growing up without a father, losing access to a family fortune, and being teased by a community of folks who did not understand him, he persevered. One final thing I want to note about this conversation is Rev. Sharpton's willingness to accept and acknowledge God's will for his life. He didn't know what the road would provide him. He had no idea that God was preparing him for stages he couldn't have imagined. But he knew that God had a plan for him in the end. He recalls that there is no real reason that a Father/son relationship between him and James Brown existed. From the outside looking in, James Brown benefitted none from embracing Sharpton as a son. However, the narrative provides a perspective that argues for a mutual benefit - the incredible embodied exchange of a Father's love for a son.

As a Father to many in the here and now, Sharpton is leading the National Action Network with the intent to push forth a cause to advance the lives of African Americans everywhere. He is charged to call the names of those who the state has wrongfully assaulted and remember them in route to justice for all. The road to our conversation was challenging because of Rev. Sharpton's hectic schedule. After months of attempts, we were finally able to connect with him in August. In the meantime, we had a preliminary conversation with him as a class with Madam President Walrond. From there, I will begin my reflection.

Class Conversation with the Reverend (April 2022)

Rev. Alfred Charles Sharpton Jr.'s life closely aligns with my experiences as a young person interested in ministry but unsure of my future. Although our initial meeting was postponed, I was fortunate to document his class address, which summarized his call to ministry in the traditional sense. He also discussed how his ministry deviates from conventional norms of preaching and ministry. I spoke with Rev. Sharpton via Zoom on August 2, 2022 for an in-depth conversation where I asked critical questions about his life experiences and the struggles of maintaining his persona as a Civil Rights leader. (Unattributed quotes come from that classroom discussion in New York, April, 2022.)

One of his fondest memories is the time in his young life when he would line up his sister's dolls to pretend they were having church. This is an innate practice of many preachers in their youth. I remember doing the same things with my cousin's dolls and stuffed animals because I had to pretend I was preaching to a congregation. I even remember holding a funeral for the family dog because he had passed unexpectedly, and I felt it was my responsibility to do so. Many of the questions I wanted to pose related to an "innate gravitation" that ministers often

think at an early age to mimic those they admire. Some of whom Rev. Sharpton mentioned were Rev. Jessie Jackson, Adam Clayton Powell, and William Augustus Jones. I want to consider this innateness as it relates to his connection and the mentoring he received from one of the world's musical icons, James Brown (more to discuss later).

Another significant moment in Rev. Sharpton's life that he willingly shared with us, also in his biography and an interview with Oprah Winfrey, was the tragedy of watching his father leave him and his Mother stranded on government assistance in New York after moving them to a luxurious house and giving him hope to grow up in a stable environment. He reports that his father left his Mother in a relationship with his Mother's oldest daughter, married her, and moved with her and Sharpton's other sister to another side of town to start a family, leaving him and his Mother stranded. Rev. Sharpton's recollection of this part of his life is something I also connect with loosely. Although my father did not abandon my Mother and me, he was tragically killed in a car accident before I was born. I think fatherhood absences cause young men to think about their lives in a particular way, in ways they would not if their fathers were present. The void in Rev. Sharpton's life was later filled with other mentors and teachers, as he described, but one in particular, James Brown, might have made the most significant personal impact.

Rev. Sharpton also reflected on his presentation as a preacher in the form of Pentecostalism. He had preached on all the Pentecostal circuits in New York by his teenage years but desired more out of ministry. He wanted to make a visible impact on society. Soon, he was introduced to Adam Clayton Powell, a Congressman and profound Pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, and he said, "That is the kind of preacher I want to be." His Mother grew concerned that Rev. Sharpton's ministry beyond Pentecostalism would cause him to leave the church because of his interest in politics. Through a connection to William Augustus Jones –

a prominent pastor in Brooklyn – he connected with Rev. Jessie Jackson, who became his teacher. Similarly, I find that my Mother has taken on similar fears for me as a minister and activist, vocalizing my disdain for the church's exclusion of women and LGBTQ people. I only hope my ministry will do as much service to the world as Rev. Sharpton's, if not more, with the grace of God.

Figure 1 - "James Brown at the Organ" 1966
Courtesy of "GOSPEL" Docu-series Production Team

Fatherhood in Black America

"In 2022, about 1.21 million Black families with a single father lived in the United States. This is an increase from 1990 when there were 472,000 Black families with a single father in the

U.S."[11] One of the ways the stereotype is being destroyed is not only by awareness but by the actual visibility of Black fathers in homes. Contrary to popular belief, white and Hispanic (Latin X) communities deal with higher percentages of disparities by the numbers. Given the number of Black people in America, which often averages out to 13 percent of the population, white families are reported to exceed the number of absent fathers in homes intended for two parents than Black families.

What adds further insult to an already apparent injury is the fact that economic differences have often contributed to the overall absence of Black fathers in traditional, heteronormative home environments. The result has been a lack of discipline in child behavior, respectability norms in society, and social/upward mobilities for Black children through education and economic streams of access. These ideas generally survey the problems children often face without access to general needs in society. However, in alignment with societal ills that push against Black men as fathers in particular, another problem that generally restricts access for Black men is racial profiling - encouraging the vicious cycle of the prison industry. This system demands Black men to become human capital for cheap labor while removing them from their families for years at a time, often for non-violent drug offenses and city violations. Though there are often exceptions to the norm, so many Black men wind up in this prison industry to meet the demands of institutional quotas invested in the prison industry. Prison industry experts and theorists on mass incarceration have often argued that the prison industry is an extension of chattel slavery in the United States. While social philosophers have even argued for prisons and the functions they possess for those who are violent, one must be willing to ask tough questions as well. What cycles are we employing by looping Black men into the prison

[11] https://www.statista.com/statistics/205099/number-of-Black-families-with-a-male-householder-in-the-us/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20there%20were%20about,single%20father%20in%20the%20U.S.

industry? What are the tenants of violent offenses? Are there restorative practices we should be using as citizens of America that are better equipped to handle both violent and non-violent crimes that don't involve the cyclic demands of the prison pipeline?

One point of exception is Rev. Al Sharpton's situation, which sits at the top. His tale is both tragic and heroic, yet the problem he faced as a child did not reveal to him a sustainable outcome during the painful memory of his absent father, a memory he suffered through as a child. Unlike many children in the United States during Sharpton's youth, his father was on a wealth track as a real estate investor. For Sharpton, his mother, and his siblings, life was already outside of the norm of other Black families. Upon his father's decision to leave his mother to mate with his oldest sister, the devastation set in and became a desperate desire for love, haunting Sharpton for the rest of his life. In the conversation referenced later in this project, Sharpton says, "I had a desire for a father without knowing it as a teenager because my father left me and my mother to live in the projects in Brooklyn."

As a result, Sharpton's life was shaped and sharpened in ways he couldn't have imagined. Might we think theologically for a moment about how his deepest desire to be loved by his father turned into one of the most significant opportunities of his life? The first time he met the man who inspired Pop music entirely, James Brown. It goes without mentioning in most circles that James Brown's significance to popular culture is unmatched. His sound, his ability to move a crowd, and his commitment to activism are rare combinations in todays world. He desired to see his people thrive. All these factors played a role in his ability to captivate and mobilize people of all nations toward societal progress. Ironically, this man became a father to the Rev. Al Sharpton.

In a sense, it seemed God would be working behind the scenes to ensure Al Sharpton understood his life assignment. Though he had pastoral influences in civil rights, none of them,

besides Dr. King, had the public appeal of James Brown. Rightfully so, the civil rights leaders Sharpton looked up to were seen by society as a threat to the supposed peace, or the veil of peace Americans pretended to live by at the time. In the midst of all of the racial chaos, tensions persisting in the South, and strategic discrimination in the Northern states, Sharpton's calling to engage popularly with multiple media platforms, as well as the communal gathering of churches, mosques, and protests, was essential to his development as a civil rights leader. Arguably, James Brown was the perfect fit for him. James Brown could not teach him how to preach, but he could teach Sharpton how to perform. Quite naturally, Sharpton needed not a lesson in preaching or civil activism. He needed someone who could lift him with a public appeal to the masses so that he might continue the longstanding efforts of civil rights leaders who preceded him. James Brown became Sharpton's father, replacing the father he was born of. According to Sharpton, it was all in the grand scheme, design, plan, and will of the God he believes in! Sharpton says, "God was using the need of a Father to make the connection! I was dealing with Daddy issues, but God was using it for where he was going to take me."

Al Sharpton and James Brown

After growing in the fight for civil rights and dealing with the naysayers who rejected him as a prophet against power structures, not just the pulpit, Rev. Sharpton became Youth Director in the New York Chapter of the SCLC and took on many issues facing the city and the world abroad. He also gained a sense of community notoriety amongst New York locals. Rev. Sharpton was well-positioned when the son of James Brown came to New York to study at Columbia University and died tragically. Therefore, when James Brown came to New York to make arrangements for his son's burial, the local DJs informed him that Rev. Al Sharpton was a

famous young preacher with whom he should connect. James Brown later established a great relationship with Rev. Sharpton in honor of his son and offered him a tour position as Brown's road manager. Rev. Sharpton recalls the story in this way:

> "I had been the youth director of Operation Bread Basket under the leadership of Rev. William Augustus at the age of 13. Likewise, when I was 16, I started my own group. When I was 18 years old, a young man joined the group from Georgia wanting to go to law school at Columbia. His name was Teddy Brown, James Brown's son. We didn't know he was James Brown's son, but a few months after moving to New York, he was killed in a car accident with some friends of his upstate. The "biggest" disk jockey (DJ) at the time in New York (1973) was a guy named Hank Spann. Hank Spann told James Brown 'If you want to do something to memorialize your son….you should do it with his (Sharpton's) group.' James Brown says 'Let me think about it.' He was preparing to perform at Symphony Hall in Newark, New Jersey. He told them to have me come over there. I went because I grew up admiring James Brown. He was the "biggest" Black artist in the world. Though I had met people like Adam Clayton Powell, going to see James Brown was like going to see a god. And when he brought me into the dressing room, he looked at me and had a rapid-fire kind of talk. He said "I'll tell you what? I'm willing to do the show but you have to follow what I say, do what I tell you to do, and promote it the way I want you to promote it, and if you sell out and I'll give you 10 percent of the money.' I did what he told me. The night of the show, he pulled up in a limousine, looked at his manager, and said, 'How do we look?' The manager said, 'The kid sold it out, both shows!' James Brown said, 'What?' The manager replied 'Yeah! And nobody is picketing about it, everything looks good!' So we walk in, and guess who is in the wing? Miles Davis! Now I'm standing there with James Brown and Miles

> Davis at a show for my youth group. It didn't get any better than that! About two weeks later, he had his manager call and flew me to LA to give him an award on SoulTrain! So now all the girls I couldn't date because I was a boy preacher thought I was the most popular guy in school because I was on SoulTrain! So that began our bonding!" [12]

What an incredible connection that must have been for his life and career. At some moments in our collaborative reflection, I wanted to talk with Rev. Sharpton about divine appointments and positions. I wondered how he felt being positioned to connect with the most incredible entertainer then. James Brown, the most important Pop musician of the time, only further solidified Sharpton's destiny and affirmed that he was in the right place at the right time. However, during his initial encounter, he recalled, there was no way he could have imagined that Brown would become the figure in Sharpton's life that he was! Even down the way Sharpton dresses to this day, his style and flair were influenced by the great James Brown.

Furthermore, what Sharpton could not have anticipated was the fact that the tragedy of Brown's son passing would be the connecting point for Brown and Sharpton. It was Sharpton's inevitable need for a Father and Brown's unexplainable longing for his missing son. All of these divine connections interfered in the lives of both Sharpton and Brown, leading them both to the point of need for each other, something neither of them knew they had. And likewise, for someone like James Brown, who appeared to have everything, the need for a son sat at the forefront of all needs!

[12] Aric Flemming, Zoom interview with Sharpton, August 2, 2022.

To further solidify the mutual importance that existed between Sharpton and James Brown, Sharpton recalls that after presenting James Brown with a National Action Network Award in the early 2000s during NAN's National Conference, among all of the awards and accolades Brown accumulated throughout his life-long career, the only award that sat at his bedside when he died was the one Sharpton gave him at the NAN conference. When James Brown died, the only two things found on his nightstand were his Bible turned to Psalm 37 (Brown's favorite passage) and Sharpton's National Action Network Award.

Figure 2 - "James Brown at the Organ" 1966
Courtesy of "GOSPEL" Docu-series Production Team

There are several other connections I want to draw as well. The story of James Brown is unique, as he suffered abandonment by his Mother at a very young age. The isolation he endured

with an abusive father caused him to search for peace elsewhere. Historians record that James Brown stumbled into a United House of Prayer for All People and found Sweet Daddy Grace - the organization's charismatic leader - in a worship gathering, dancing across the pulpit, running and shouting, inviting those in attendance to partake in a “frenzy.” This moment is an experience very closely related to that of Pentecostal Christianity. Being so indirectly influenced by what he saw in Sweet Daddy Grace, James Brown adopted his flamboyant style and dress, making it popular with others like Prince, Elvis, and Michael Jackson. They would later imitate his musical presentation and sound in various ways. All in all, Pentecostalism is the root of everything we hear sonically in popular culture today. He recalls the day James Brown disclosed the secret to his artistry in this way:

> “I started feeling this for James Brown. And I think I became like the son he never had. And he had other kids. He sent for me to come to Augusta to spend time with him, and I found out his older daughter Deanna said that one of the things that got me and James Brown so close is that I would stay up and listen to all of his old war stories while the other children were trying to get away from them. She said, “You would drink it up!” James Brown had about 33 cars. He loved collecting. And I remember one night, we got in one of his antique cars, and we drove across the bridge because his estate was in South Carolina, right across the bridge from Augusta, where he grew up. We drove about 2 miles into Augusta around 9 pm where he pulled into the parking lot of the United House of Prayer for All People - Sweet Daddy Grace’s church in Augusta. He stopped. And we’re sitting there and you could hear they were having church inside. And we’re sitting there (in the car) and kept sitting there. A few minutes passed and I was like ‘I wonder why we're here? Are we picking someone up, what are we

doing?' Finally, he said to me, 'You hear that?' I said, 'Hear what?' He said, 'You hear that inside the church?' I said, 'Yeah!' He said, 'That choir and that drummer, and the band, they are on the half beat (demonstrating) 1,3,1,3, where most music is on the 2, 4 boom, boom, boom.' He said, 'When I was a kid, I used to come and stand outside this church. I didn't have clothes decent enough to go inside. And I used to listen to the service outside. And that's where I developed my beat that they talk about all over the world. When I say get on the 1, I learned it from that church.' I said, 'Are you serious?' He said, 'Listen!' And it was the same beat as in his music. He would share things like that with me!"[13]

[13] Ibid.

Figure 3 - Daddy Grace Baptizes in a pool, Augusta, Georgia, 1940.
Courtesy of Milledge Murray, Private Collection
Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer by Marie Dallam

I also want to highlight Rev. Sharpton's unapologetic style and approach to activism, which seems to combine Rev. Jessie Jackson and James Brown (Brown, who was also known to speak truth to power during the Civil Rights Era). Even down to the physical presentation we see today. For example, Rev. Sharpton credits James Brown with introducing him to the perm he still

wears today. Ironically, the first time he wore it was while traveling with James Brown in D.C. to the White House to meet the President – a place Rev. Sharpton now frequents as an advisor on civil and voting rights for all people. Likewise, his bold persona – especially in his earlier years – is a product of the manhood he developed under the personal mentorship of James Brown. Lastly, Rev. Sharpton's influence within the music industry came from his experience as James Brown's road manager. It helped him invite singers and activists like Ms. Aretha Franklin and other popular influencers to galvanize Black votes, support national marches, and raise awareness of the issues facing our community amongst the generations. Sharpton says:

> "I would go on the road with him, he would always insist,' Reverend, stay in my dressing room, when I go to the stage, you stay in the wing….these people are not good people, you're a minster!' He used to sometimes make me wear minister's collars! The only time I've ever worn ministers collars in my life was when I had to be out there with James Brown. He'd be very strict! Later in life, he wanted to get baptized, and I went back down, Rev. Bush and I, to baptize him! I spoke at his 3rd wife's funeral. I spoke at his father's funeral and ended up doing the Eulogy at his funeral. He loved the 37th Psalm. He had a real prime for spirituality. A lot of his music was just Black church Gospel in a secular setting and he knew it but would not change because he said 'this is what brought us from slavery to Jim Crow, to now!"[14]

[14] Ibid.

Figure 4 - “James Brown at the organ”, 1966
Courtesy of “GOSPEL” Docu-series Production Team

Sharpton’s influence in famous media circuits is something he credits James Brown with providing him. All of the rallies, marches, and public activism he engaged in over the breadth of his career were directly influenced by his receptive ear to the wisdom of the world’s biggest Pop sensation, whose talents would precede, develop, and produce the next generation of the worlds Pop sensations. Sharpton recalls when he realized the cultural impact James Brown passed down to him. He says:

> “One of the reasons a lot of the Rap artists and even the younger Pop artists supported me was because of James Brown! Michael Jackson idolized James Brown and Michael Jackson called me and said ‘What would James do, where was James at? And

> when I was doing communal affairs, he came up to National Action Network, and I ended up doing the Eulogy at Michael's funeral and got Michael to come to James's funeral. That was all based on James Brown. I remember I was at Essence Music Festival right before the Pandemic, we were in the Superdome, and a guy came backstage and said, "Snoop Dog wants to see you.' I said, "Okay." Snoop Dog said to me, "James Brown told me when I was on my way up, they're going to give you problems one day, but ' you ever hear of Reverend Al Sharpton….you can trust him'!" I said, 'Mr. Brown told you that?' He said, 'Yeah!' These were the kids that grew up sampling James Brown! So God knew that he would give me a certain cultural resonance to help me organize that generation that was coming behind me. So Puffy and all of them relate to me because of James! I couldn't have gotten that credibility from a Minister. I could only get that from somebody like him because they looked up to him! So it's all in God's plan!"[15]

His trusted relationship with James brown only solidified Sharpton's ability to handle the spotlight, a mantle not fit for an ordinary copycat minister. In his book, The Rejected Stone, Sharpton writes about those who intended to mock him as a puppet of Black liberation, "While those caricatures might have come media shorthand, I was not about to let the world define me."[16] In a further conversation with me on James Brown, Sharpton recalled the following:

> "He would always say, 'One thing I want you to promise me is that you won't imitate others, be your own man, do your own thing! Promise me!

[15] Ibid.

[16] Sharpton, Al. *The Rejected Stone: Al Sharpton & the Path to American Leadership*. Simon & Schuster, 2014, 7.

> Because you're around a lot of the big preachers. Learn from them! I learned from Little Richard, I learned from Nat King Cole, I learned from Sam Cooke, but I put it in my own style.' He said, 'You are in a Northern setting, New York, and most of these guys, Dr. King and Jesse (Jackson) came out of the South. The Northern urban center is a different world! You have to compete in New York, where they see everything - Broadway lights, The Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, but they don't have to compete with that in Atlanta, Augusta, or Memphis. So you have to develop a style, I don't know what it is, and you have to develop a way of getting through to attract people away from all of the attractions. I don't know if you can do it, but I know that's what you will have to do!' So I think he impacted me being convicted in my religious beliefs because I saw that he was the "biggest" secular star in Black America who read the bible and helped shape and mold me to believe that I couldn't, not be conducive to the setting God put me in. And even though the style would appear outrageous to some, sometimes you have to be outrageous to get people's attention and to bring them back. So the activism people saw me do in the '80s and '90s was part of a personality I developed to try to arrest the attention on 'Ya'll are killing us!' The media would play me up as a caricature but that was a strategy, not an accident, because now that I have your attention, we're going to talk about George Floyd, 'Now that I have your attention!" [17]

Sharpton was not short of inspiration and challenge from the funkmaster himself. While he loved Sharpton as a son, he sat patiently with him through trials, tribulations, successes, and

[17] Flemming, Sharpton interview.

failures. Some might argue that Sharpton was spoiled with access to the wisdom he was granted just by being around the pop star. James Brown made certain Sharpton understood the challenges before him and imparted narratives. A witness that supported the budding imagination of a young Sharpton headed for a life among the stars! Sharpton recalls:

> "James Brown said, 'The difference between a lounge act and a Las Vegas show is that the lounge act has to do whatever they can to get someone's attention. But in a show, you have to get on that stage and perform! Never take your lounge act to the showroom. When you get on that stage, let them know you have content you didn't perform in the lounge!' He would say things like that. And when I got to walk up that circular road at the White House to see President Obama, it hit me, 'We made it to the big stage, we got a show to do'!"[18]

The Legacy of Al Sharpton

His message and the messages he received from James Brown extend beyond words. But his words lead a new generation of activists, leaders, preachers, creatives, scientists, and scholars to do all they can in everything they do. Life without ups and downs is no life at all. Though roads may challenge us in uncomfortable and sometimes unfathomable ways, we must relentlessly remain content and persistent on the missions, visions, and goals we have set for ourselves. Even when we feel we are outside of our supposed purpose. It is wise to consider that our roads may wind and bend in many directions. However, our callings and purposes must remain consistent until we see them manifested.

[18] Ibid.

With this in mind, I want to highlight how honored I was to have the privilege to speak with Rev. Sharpton. I am deeply inspired by his life's work and his impact on the world against the odds. He does not pastor a traditional church, but he leads a powerful organization called the National Action Network (NAN), a non-profit entity with chapters nationwide standing in the fight for social change. Moreover, although they are not a traditional church, they have a weekly gathering on Saturday Mornings at 9 a.m. at the NAN headquarters called the House of Justice in Harlem. There, they have gospel singing, worship, and preaching, sometimes in the style of even the Pentecostal church. Yet, somehow, they maintain their commitment to justice and equality without losing hope in God. NAN understands that even though they are not Pentecostal as a collective, they would not successfully engage in fights for justice without pulling on the memory of the God they know. The God that their mothers gave them growing up. For Rev. Sharpton, it's the God his Mother raised him to know growing up as a Pentecostal boy preacher in New York. Likewise, I did not pastor a traditional church, but a modern-age churches called UNDRGRND Church – A virtual community of faith. We also worshipped on Saturdays at 11. Although we identified as a worship space entirely, we were committed to fighting for justice, education, and equity and speaking truth to power as all ministries should.

When I first embarked upon this journey to the Doctor of Ministry, I had a set outline for the format and content of this work. However, as time passed, the project took on many different forms and began shape-shifting to emphasize hidden gems I assumed were obvious. For example, the influence of James Brown on the Reverend Al Sharpton seemed to be a minor point worth mentioning in the work until I discovered that this relationship sits at the nexus of my current research, the spiritual dichotomy of the sacred and secular (in music more specifically). I wanted to argue for the continuity between genres like Gospel and R&B (modern genres). This

was all fine until I discovered that their Father/son relationship is the epitome of my problem with the dichotomy. An obsession with the right approach to spirituality through the right means instead of the wrong means. In our example, all rules of engaging spirituality are defied, disobeyed, and destroyed. Much like the example of Jesus, whenever he encountered someone deemed unworthy to engage by society's standards, he moved beyond the barriers of difference to acknowledge their humanity and address their needs.

The relationship between James Brown and Al Sharpton sits right on the line of difference. A kid preacher and a Pop Star formed a bond of mutual mentorship in spirituality and creativity that surpassed the expectations of both parties. The sacred is indeed informed by the secular, and the secular is likewise informed by the holy. Who would have thought you could get enhanced spirituality from secular music and that a secular concert would be empowered by spirituality?

The dichotomy may reveal to us the complexity of humanity. Perhaps we each have things to offer each other in the ways that Al Sharpton and James Brown were able to support one another. The significance of this connection between the two shows us that we can live in a world where our commitments, engagements, and services looks different. Yet, we can still commit to a cause greater than ourselves.

Toward the end of our conversation, I asked Rev. Sharpton what are your hopes for the future of ministers. He responded: “My hopes are that we continue to see ministers in the prophetic tradition that are not preaching to be clergymen for respectability, that we don’t preach to be in the Cathedral or the Sanctuary, but that we deal with the needs of the people and do it in a way that elevates them and not for self-aggrandizement.” My wishes for ministry echo the sentiments of the Reverend. Indeed, I hope to embody a similar boldness, posture, and focus that

emphasizes a relentless passion for ministry in the most progressive and radical ways. Let us love radically to the point where it even makes us uncomfortable. Let us move into an ethic that liberates us from our bondages and causes us to think beyond what we can do for ourselves toward what we can do for others! Lastly, Rev. Sharpton imparted wisdom into my future to encourage me on the path I'm currently on! Reflecting on his lowest moments throughout his career, he said "Embrace what God made you and have your ministry wrapped around that and serve the people of your time." He added to the last of our words, thinking aloud, "Don't be afraid to get knocked down. Be afraid of getting knocked out. You're supposed to be knocked down because you appreciate up when you've been knocked down!"

Before the current flow of my research, my original research question was: How can African-American churches develop a proactive theology on social inclusion? I planned to engage in a Qualitative Research Methodology connecting with multiple churches in a single area, social location, or network (denomination, affiliation, etc.), gathering testimonials and observing the congregation. I am now invested in how Gospel and Secular genres relate and how their roots can inform social justice activism from all angles in the here and now. With Rev. Sharpton's narrative at the forefront, we might be able to make historical connections that solidify a theoretical proposition that creatives can and do influence activism by way of multiple genres, starting with a type of Pentecostalism (seen in the work of Sweet Daddy Grace and the United House of Prayer for All People) that undoubtedly sits at the root of all art and activism. Kelly Brown Douglas, Ashon Crawley, James Cone, and Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes have each offered insights for understanding the institutions that produce Pentecostalism's experienced inside and outside of the church through many different genres, some of whose work I hope to include as this project continues to progress.

Chapter 3: Pentecostalism & Ministerial Competencies

This chapter explores the foundational elements of my theological commitments, ministry pursuits, and professional hopes for future ministry endeavors. First, this chapter explores the contextualization and the use of the term Pentecost. What are the tenants of the word? What is the general meaning of the word? How does the word suppose a type of religious formation tied to the experience of Black "folk" (from folklore).[19] Next, we explore the purpose of the word "Pentecostalism." This chapter asks critical questions about the term's connotation, historical background, and how we plan to employ it in this discussion. Beyond the term, this chapter discusses how Pentecostalism shows up today within our theoretical framework. I then place myself amid four prioritized ministry competencies that express my active participation in ministry today. The following competencies represent my current ministry endeavors: Theologian, Worship Leader, Prophet, and technology leader.

Historical Pentecostalism

Lincoln and Mamiya record a history of the traditional Holiness movements in America. "Accurate statistics for either Holiness or Pentecostal groups are problematical, although the Pentecostals are widely acknowledged to be the fastest-growing segment of the Black religious family. There are fewer Holiness bodies than Pentecostal; estimates of a total Black Holiness

[19] Drake, Jamil. *To Know the Soul of a People: Religion, Race, and the Making of the Southern Folk*. Oxford University Press, 2022, x.

membership of 100,000 have been put forth in recent years. Most of these are accounted for by four Holiness groups, the largest of which is the Church of the Living God (or Christian Workers for Fellowship, known locally as C.W.F.F.), organized in 1889. The Free Christian Zion Church of Christ began in 1905, the Church of Christ (Holiness), U.S.A., in 1907, and the National Convention of the Churches of God, Holiness in 1914. Some 10,000 Blacks are estimated to be members of the white Holiness denomination, the Church of the Nazarene."[20]

For this text, the borrowed elements of America's historical Holiness (Pentecostal) movements will aid us in thinking about the beginnings of these movement in America. Still, one must wrestle with these organizations' rules, regulations, or doctrinal convictions. Furthermore, Lincoln and Mamiya report, "Just as Methodism was originally a part of the Puritan movement within the Anglican Church, so did Holiness originate as a reform movement within Methodism. The Wesleyan tenet of sanctification or Christian perfection distinguished the Methodist movement from its earliest days. During the 1840s and 1850s, the idea of "perfectionism" became widespread among other denominations, largely because of the revivals and camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening. However, in the South, the emphasis on spiritual perfection was eclipsed by the Civil War, and the revitalized enthusiasm for the doctrine that emerged in reaction to this conflict ultimately proved to be schismatic."[21] We must contextualize the foundations of Pentecostalism as resistant to status quo, white, and mainline denominations to advance the point and purpose of using the word "Pentecostalism."

[20] Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Black Pentecostals: The Spiritual Legacy with a Black Beginning." *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Duke University Press, 1990, 76–91.

[21] Ibid

An in-depth history has been transcribed in Deidre Crumbly's "Dressed as Becometh Holiness: Gender, Race, and the Body in a Storefront Sanctified Church," found in Judith Castleburry's *Spirit on the Move.* Crumbly reports:

> As part of a religious ideology that went hand in hand with expanding empire, Christian dualism and color coding would be employed to valorize racialized hierarchies that "civilized" out-of-control savages through national agendas of colonization and enslavement (Asad 1997: 43; Hood 1994: 115–32; Pandian 1985: 70–84; Rigby 1996: 9–10). Savage others with female bodies were further targeted because of the uses to which their bodies would be put in advancing empire building. The souls of Africa were divided among various Christian denominations much as the continent had been divided by and among European nations at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, which, according to original documents, convened "to ensure by arrangements suitable to modern requirements the application of the general principles of civilisation established by the Acts of Berlin and Brussels" (Crumbley 2008a: 126–27).6 Mission churches, backed by the power and protection of colonial authorities and commercial interest, would displace traditional religious systems until indigenized formulations of Christianity emerged with the rise of African Initiated/ Instituted Churches (aics). The aics selectively incorporated African religious traditions into localized expressions of 98 Deidre Helen Crumbley Christianity (Anderson 2001; Crumbley 2008b: 6–65; Jules-Rosette 1975; Opoku 1990; Oshun 1983: 105–14; Ositelu 2002; Peel 1968: 148; Sanneh 1990: 176–98; Sundkler 1971). In diaspora, enslaved Africans were forcibly removed to the New World without the comfort of personal possessions and symbolic objects from their homeland. Nevertheless, their bodies served as matrixes of memories and as literal culture bearers (Austin-Broos 1997: 6–7, 13; Starke 1990: 76). Selected religious practices were kept alive during almost two hundred years that elapsed between the slaves' arrival in North America circa 1619 and the end of the second Great Awakening in 1815, when, for the first time, a concerted effort was made to Christianize Blacks (Raboteau 1978: 149). The Great Awakening's privileging of embodied spirit reinforced selective African traditions of worship, including religious dance and spirit possession; however, the cultural affirmation of such ritual acts as shouting and Holy

> Ghost indwelling was accompanied by Platonized dualistic images of the body as dangerously erotic and in need of taming. Diane Austin-Broos notes this paradox in other parts of the African diaspora, observing that moralistic, eros-denying elements of Christianity are salient features of Jamaican Pentecostalism. The ecstasy of being filled with the Holy Ghost, she argues, has its source in West African non-dualistic affirmations of life and spirit. At first, this coexistence of affirmed and constrained bodies may seem irreconcilable; however, Austin-Broos observes that Pentecostal asceticism and morality lend the social capital of propriety to members of lower socioeconomic strata—especially to poor, dark-skinned women—enhancing their ability to negotiate inequitable social structures (Austin-Broos 1997: 6–7, 13, 34–35, 38, 116, 156, 195–204, 233–34).[22]

What is Pentecost?

The New Revised Standard Version Bible: **1** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability[23].

Obrey Hendricks recalls, "This is the faith of which I am heir. It is a faith that takes seriously the ethical demands of the Gospel to love our neighbors as ourselves and to seek the salvation and well-being of the whole people, like the New Testament figure Simeon, who being 'righteous and devout,' with 'the Holy Spirit rested upon him,' prayed for the common good, the

[22] Casselberry, Judith, and Elizabeth A. Pritchard, editors. *Spirit on the Move: Black Women and Pentecostalism in Africa and the Diaspora*. Duke Univ., 2019, 98.

[23] New Revised Standard Version, Acts 2:2-4

'consolation,' or deliverance of his whole people from their travails at the hands of their Roman oppressors (Luke 2:25)."[24]

Let's analyze the formation of sacred texts within the context of the New Testament. We discover a unique emphasis on how transformation happens amongst groups that desire or need transformation. Pentecost is described in the sacred text as a moment in which the spirit of God is involved in the lived experiences of a particular group toward an end of transformation or an enhanced life spiritually and communally. Characteristics of this group might have included people who were historically and traditionally marginalized because of their commitment to a societal rebel's message of hope, liberation, and bright futures. They were ostracized and haunted by the government for not adhering to the traditions, customs, and laws set in place by the state, a majority Judaist population.

Therefore, Pentecost represents the experience of euphoria toward a transformative self-awareness of the oppressed, which involves a gathering of people, a descension of the Holy Spirit through sound, and activation of those people with new abilities, perspectives, and understanding. First, the gathering of the people is something we might analyze. The characteristics of the figures involved in this documented experience reflect that a small group of societal rebels (Christians/Followers of the Way/Christ) were journeying together to a place. Once they arrived in one place with the same intention and desire to be empowered by the holy spirit and liberated from societal bondage, they were met with a transformative power that they believed was a derivative of the divine. Furthermore, what categorizes the oppressed group is their desire to gather and their willingness to be empowered.

[24] Hendricks Jr, Obery M. *Christians Against Christianity: How Right-wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith*. Beacon Press, 2021, xv.

I contend that the type of transformation that happened for those gathered in this room (the Upper Room), Pentecost, happens under situations/circumstances represented above and under the following two conditions of the people: intention and desperation. A Pentecost intended is one that the people themselves conjure through ritualistic modes, which might include musical expressions described by Ashon Crawley, choreo-sonic dance expressed by Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, and perhaps a mixture of both music and dance as raised by Albert Raboteau. A Pentecostal experience that happens through despair is generated on behalf of the oppressed group with aid from the God they serve. African-American Sociologists and historians like C. Eric Lincoln (co-author of *The Black Church in the African American Experience*) reflect that Africans forced to travel through the trans-Atlantic slave trade were met with a challenged to reckon with their oppressed identities as enslaved people while trying to hold on to and maintain the African traditions and customs they brought with them, but practiced in silence. As a result, they engaged in the African practices they retained to conjure a worldview and perspective of liberation while they were still enslaved. They sang songs, participated in the historical tradition of ring shouting, and bonded together in sound and action with the intent to see the Holy Spirit descend on them as it did on the biblical account of the day of Pentecost. In this assessment, the goal is not to defend, prove, or make apologetic arguments for the actual happenings of the day. Whether the day of Pentecost happened is not our concern here. We are more interested in how the early Black church interpreted the narrative and how we have continued to engage portals to liberation in an oppressed state through the same means and under the same conditions: intention, despair, and sometimes both!

Therefore, the lens of Pentecost or Pentecostal experiences, for the sake of this work, will be used to describe occurrences through vehicles of creativity, such as music and dance, that

generate activations of the Holy Spirit to bring about a sound like a "violent rushing wind" and "fill" those in participation. However, the vagueness of such an experience might not appear as evident. For example, If one is riding in their car listening to uplifting music (Aretha's "Bridge Over Troubled Water") under uncontrolled life situations, their desperation to relieve the pressure might cause an emotional response that conjures a spiritual experience. That spiritual experience might look like singing along lyric-by-lyric with the song playing, visible tears, high-volume vocal exclamations, and many forms of biological release, all in one setting - the car. Likewise, someone could be having a moment watching a performance, standing in a concert hall, entranced in a euphoria through sound because everyone is singing one song on one accord (Beyonce's mute challenge may come to mind)[25]. Could we describe this as a Pentecost of sorts? I contend that with a theological description of the Holy Spirit as having no limitations or boundaries, Pentecost at its core is not restricted to destination, sound, feeling, or activity; it can happen anywhere at any time.

What, Then, Can Be Said About Pentecost?

Ashon Crawley suggests, "The "space" of the Black Pentecostal tradition is multivocal: it is a space where the sensuousness of the Black body finds meaning through the conferral of power and authority while, simultaneously and contradictorily, the space disciplines and policies particularly dangerous modes of power and authority of the agential self, through confusing and abusive discourse about sexuality."[26]

[25] Richardson, Randi. "What Is Beyoncé's 'Mute' Challenge? How 1 Line Became a Concert Phenomenon." *Today.Com/PopCulture*, 7 Sept. 2023, https://www.today.com/popculture/music/beyonce-mute-challenge-meme-explained-rcna103831.

[26] Crawley, Ashon T. "'Let's Get It on!': Performance Theory and Black Pentecostalism." Black Theology, vol. 6, no. 3, Sept. 2008, 308–29.

In the framework of Pentecostalism as a spiritual experience, euphoria, or religious experience, it is essential to answer the question, "What elements of worship are needed to describe or express the type of spiritual experience as previously described?" Perhaps Music (by instrumentation, lyric, vocal performance) or musical embodied activity (clapping, singing, shouting) is a centralizing/necessary part of the gathering - a mission to mobilize the gathered to an act, or to action, a focus/intention toward one or multiple of the following ideals - liberation, freedom, justice, faith, hope, love, peace, and joy. Lincoln and Mamiya describe the origins of the historic Pentecostal Movement as a "Movement from which whites subsequently withdrew. The modern Pentecostal movement in the United States, inclusive of both Black and white people, dates from the Azusa Street Revival held in Los Angeles from 1906 to 1909 under the leadership of William J. Seymour, a Black Holiness preacher. Pentecostalism, in turn, as suggested by Seymour's background, had roots in the Holiness movement of the latter part of the nineteenth century.[27]" Similarly, I want to think beyond the formation of the historically instituted Pentecostal Church movement and emphasize the importance of the sacred gathering evidenced by glossolalia, or the modern understanding of "speaking in tongues." To frame this part of the conversation, I will borrow the idea of glossolalia as an action closely aligned with the participatory elements required to generate a spiritual experience and define glossolalia as an act toward an end (liberation, freedom, justice, faith, hope, love, peace, and joy). Perhaps for us as inhabitants of modernity, we employ music and dance, maybe even creative artistic expressions such as painting, writing, conversing, or teaching in the classroom, as actions toward an end of liberation.

[27] Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Black Pentecostals: The Spiritual Legacy with a Black Beginning." *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Duke University Press, 1990, 76–91.

Furthermore, Gospel music will serve as the closest example of what is meant by the term "act" or "action" toward an "end" of liberation. One could rightfully argue that music and music's versatility of expression can account for how divine experiences happen inside and outside the church's four walls. For example, in a charismatic worship style, format, or environment, a church member could potentially self-generate a Pentecostalism, an experience within the context of their home, vehicle, or even a private office, or the comfort of headphones (an enclosed space) that allows them access to music or a musical experiences. While engaging music without a gathering, spiritual experiences become more and more possible as the person becomes more and more engulfed in the lyrical content, the musical composition, and the internal desire to engage Ashon Crawley's "Otherwise."

Based on this definition, with music, spiritual experiences/Pentecost's can and do happen in churches, stadiums, work offices, nightclubs, houses, and cars. However, a judgment metric for the spiritual experience one can have through music might depend on the lyrical content or the musical composition. I am not suggesting that music always generates a spiritual experience, regardless of a person's desire to evoke a spiritual experience. Suppose a person seeks a spiritual experience through music. In that case, a spiritual experience will be made available, especially if the music as an action moves the seeker toward an end of liberation. Gospel music itself does not possess a monopoly on the musical and lyrical content that generates spiritual experiences. Rhythm & Blues and Hip Hop genres can generate Pentecostalism, a spiritual experience through an act of music toward an end of liberation. Concrete examples of songs that have historically done this work can be found in my report on findings from collected interviews!

Ministerial Competencies

One of the things I enjoy reflecting on the most is my upbringing! I grew up in a large church in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia, where my grandfather still serves as the Senior Pastor and has served in that role and many others since the late 70's. A little more context around the type of church might help to clarify how I conceptualize Black church experiences as a whole. Mt. Carmel Baptist Church on the southwest side of Atlanta, GA, was a multigenerational powerhouse ministry in the early 90s and late 2000s. The church had an international reputation with networks that expanded across countries around the globe. Its beginnings encompass Black churchgoers in the South during the Jim Crow era who lived in a neighborhood historically known as Summerhill. The current location of the area is now heavily populated with new Atlanta transplants due to the benefit of gentrification in urban areas - an outcome not so fortunate for Black people who established their foundations in the city. From a locale to international prominence, the church grew to its powerhouse form in the late 80s with a congregational attendance of 10,000 people weekly. They also gathered building funds to relocate the church from the historic Summerhill district to Campbellton Rd. in the early 90s - the best decision for a church to make, settling in the midst of one of the city's most thriving local economies!

Under the leadership of my grandfather, the church rose to heights beyond imagination. Though the church was a powerhouse in its heyday, its prominence is often credited to its fearless leadership. As a preacher, civil rights activist, performer, business owner, and man of many other talents, he maintained a standard of excellence, representing the church to the nation and beyond. He is a national recording artist, an international Stellar Music Award winner, and one of the first Black pastors to host a recurring national syndicated televangelist broadcast on

BET. He is also a graduate of Morehouse College. He has been awarded several honorary doctorate degrees, which speak to his profound sermon writing ability and intellectual prowess as a thought leader and Pastor of a modern megachurch.

While these accolades speak highly of the influence he and the church developed over the years, what is even more impressive is how the church constructed worship gatherings. The church's genius is that it was able to maneuver through the barriers of time to maintain its relevance as worship trends specifically advanced across churches in society. For example, in a post-pandemic worship setting, for churches with advanced technology advanced enough to offer hybrid services for parishioners to be both in-person and online during worship gatherings, Black churches across the nation have been willing to adopt a modern format for platforms that works well for tech/media display and performance during worship. On a given performance stage in any church, pulpits have transformed from platforms with royal chairs that emphasize the importance of the church leaders who sit in them during worship to leveled stages with multipurpose functionalities that invite praise team members, bands, and ministry participants to minister from the stage. Lastly, many churches have enhanced their display models by adding giant screens in the sanctuary for multimedia advanced production purposes during worship.

For Mt. Carmel's worship format specifically, I want to discuss three phases of worship as framing for my religious context and how we will interpret Pentecost in this work: traditional, contemporary, and modern. First, I should mention the traditional forms of worship. The Black Baptist tradition of prayer is one that Lincoln and Mamiya reference as a standard identity marker for Black Baptist churches. This worship style often includes hymnology, hymn lining, outward vocal worship, expression, and Baptist fits (spirit possession toward expressions of

gratitude and liberation). These modes were present in the church during the traditional era, which could be located between 1980 and 1995.

The second era of worship came about when gospel sounds in the popular media changed from a dominant traditional form and sound to a contemporary sound. Ironically, worship expressions started to look and sound a little different. I came around during this era. I remember days when our church would look and sound more charismatic and traditionally Pentecostal (a subset of Christian denominations - not related to our Pentecost definition) in form and worship. There was dancing and speaking in tongues, which became an additional regular practice during worship for parishioners. Therefore, we took on the colloquial title "Bapticostal" to describe our charismatic tendencies as a warning to the traditionalists who would challenge our worship evolution.

The last era is the modern era, the present-day era of worship. This style and flow are symbolized by a hybrid gathering and heavy reliance on multimedia support to enhance parishioners' worship experiences in person and online. While both traditionalists and contemporaries still offer their unique worship expressions, the modern area is set to include multiple worship styles and modes of engagement.

As a Theologian

Howard Thurman, one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century, says in his sacred text, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, "One could be selfish, using his possessions – material or spiritual – for strictly private or personal ends."[28] With this access to a library for spiritual language, it may be easy to abuse this power granted to me. However, sacred humility is a

[28] Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Beacon Press, 2022, 132.

penultimate necessity for ministry engagement in any ministerial context. One of several ministerial competencies includes my thinking identity as a theologian. Upon my arrival to theological education, I was introduced to the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who emphasized personalist philosophy which is discussed more in depth later in this chapter. As a student, King was challenged to maintain methods and motions committed to imparting ways of actualizing personalism in his preaching, leadership, and daily life. Being so closely tied to Atlanta, much like King, I've been motivated to think with his vision for a future world and his hopes for Black institutions like Historically Black Colleges and Universities and churches.

As a student at Morehouse College, I was initiated into a tradition of Black college men attending HBCUs. There, I was encouraged to adopt principles of engagement using social ideals like Traveling, Reading, Speaking, Dressing well, and Balancing my life's commitments. Professor James Cone was instrumental in developing my thoughts around liberation as a commitment to said life. Cone's influence on me as a theologian helped me understand how my own liberation was at stake. Beyond the self, *God of the Oppressed* [29] pushed me to reinterpret God for my faith community, given the conditions under which we received theology and God. I recognized how my belief in God did not align with how the God of my previous fundamentalist theological commitments could not serve the church toward better living. It was a reinforcement of the white supremacist power structure in American culture.

There, I even gained great gratitude for the challenges these thinkers provided me in my theological development. I gleaned from the work of womanist theologians like Emily Townes and Kelly Brown Douglas. Emily Townes' work on the cultural production of evil and the barricades that inequitably distribute support and recognition of Black women in America

[29] Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Orbis Books, 1997.

transformed the framework I previously used to see myself as a Black man in America, relative to the unfathomable experiences of Black women. I realized each of the characters she detailed in her work represented the Black women I came from. I saw each character as a divine figure and a nod to Black women's power. Douglas's work likewise caused a massive transformation in my theology, particularly around my conservative adopted ideals around God and sexuality.

As a Worship Leader

Growing up in church, I was naturally encouraged to sing and embrace the art of music. Without recognizing how much of a product of my grandfather's ministry I was, I quickly began wanting and envisioning my life as a potential replica of his. Even though I'd be understood as an active minister in the field, I would also be known and recognized as a singer. Throughout his 50+ year ministry, my grandfather has composed, produced, and released ten independent music projects under his record label.

Through multiple engagements in church contexts, I became a vocalist at a young age, following in my grandfather's footsteps. In my way, I entered a mode of worship leading that would allow me to hone musical skills like singing and songwriting, which I'd always been interested in developing. As a result, I became a singer/songwriter by profession and grew musically influential relationships with multiple artists, producers, songwriters, and creatives inside and outside of the church. Some of these creatives have worked with the world's most renowned artists and still hold significant accolades and industry respect. In line with the mission of this work, some of their testimonies can be found in the following chapters. In conversation with them, we found ways to reminisce on specific experiences in music that we shared and how we were impacted individually and collectively by the power of those moments. Some of the

moments we recalled were in church, while others might have happened in the studio. Some even happened by sitting in a car and listening to a song one of us had recorded the night before. In each interaction, I found ways to enhance my skills and perfect the craft of worship leading through music and professional mentorship.

As a Prophetic Agent

I remember when I was a kid growing up in Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, where much of the traditional Pentecostal movement's tenants were present in my everyday interactions. When I would go to school, I was understood as the church boy who loved God and loved Jesus. I wasn't seen as a preacher, but teachers would consistently identify that something very specific about me was different from other children. Because of what I saw my grandfather doing growing up, laying hands on members during our worship services and engaging glossolalia, I imagined myself with the same abilities as a child.

There was one moment where I specifically remember laying hands on one of my teacher's forehead because she was complaining about a headache that wouldn't go away. Whether it was true or not, the teacher exclaimed that my laying on of hands released a power that caused her headache to go away. Experiences and moments of what felt like divine intervention encouraged a spirituality that believes in supernatural activity. In her formative work, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Emily Townes suggests, "It is in the dancing mind – where we tease through the possibilities and the realities, the hopes, the dreams, the nightmares, the terrors, the critique, the analysis, the plea, the witness – that womanist work is done in the academy, in the classroom, in the religious gatherings of our various communities,

in those quiet and not so quiet times in which we try to reflect on how we know and see and feel and do." [30]

Now that my definition of prophetic has expanded, the meaning of the word prophetic symbolizes a type of critique against the powers that be to level the playing field relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. It became an adaptation of my theological understanding of James Cone's work. This prior marginal conversation leads me to Womanist Theology, a communal work advancing marginal conversations.

As an Ecumenist

I see myself as an Ecumenist under the influence of one of my great mentors, Dean Lawrence Edward Carter, Sr., Dean of the Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College. My theology, activism in religion, and perspectives on inclusion are rooted in the personalist philosophy I was introduced to in college. Personalist philosophy generally assumes the sacred dignity of all people as the sole reason for respect. Regardless of racial/ethnic identity, gender expression, sexual identity, or any other identity markers, one should always honor the sacred dignity of every human being. In *The Four Agreements*, Miguel Ruiz writes about a discovery his close friend made on a spiritual journey, "Everything in existence is a manifestation of the one living being we call God. Everything is God."[31]

Likewise, breaking the theological foundations I had established growing up, which emphasized separation on the merit of holiness and holy living, took a lot of work for me to

[30] Townes, E. M. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 2.

[31] Ruiz, D. M. *The Four Agreements*. Amber-Allen Publishing, 2001, xvii.

accept and undergo. However, in the deconstruction process, I adopted a perspective that allows and makes space for multiple faith traditions, religious practices, cultural expressions & customs. In fact, to my advantage, I managed to engage in rituals of worship and conjured experiences from Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim faith traditions.

For example, during my years in divinity school, I developed relationships with classmates who were regionally close to me but also with others from a completely separate part of the world. With that said, my Hindu and Muslim friends from Southeast Asia were excited to introduce me to the idea of food intimacy. They shared with me the ways they eat - without forks - which introduced a concept of engaging with food that did not involve utensils. At first, it was a little difficult to understand until I realized how close their practices were to mine when eating hot wings or a burger. As Americans, we have many foods we culturally don't use forks to eat with, much like the aforementioned foods. Therefore, my introduction to food intimacy is not new; it was instead revealed - perhaps something I've known all along, but with new people, which made the revelations feel new!

Toward an Ethic of Liberation

Toward a reality that centers liberation as the focus and goal of all life - that is the goal of my ministerial practice. I believe in a world where people can truly be free. I believe in a world where humans recognize the power that belongs to each of us and the power we acknowledge in each other. In a more literal sense, I believe in the potential of a world actualized where everyone's intention is the liberation of the oppressed. However, potential energy without action toward activity or change remains as it is: potential. If the energy is not actualized, its point and purpose cannot be revealed. Suppose our goals as a nation (America) are to see economic

stabilization and equity across identity markers in industries and communities. In that case, we must realize and deal with the problem as it persists. However, that reality is only one that remains potentially possible because the people who work to maintain the status quo are not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to actualize equity and economic stability. Indeed, it might benefit from its dysfunction. Those committed to financial stability and equity in industries nationwide should not remain silent but actively continue to voice concern, raise awareness, and hopefully bring about the change they wish to see. A Pentecostal experience often empowers those committed to fighting injustices, a moment of euphoria where they've realized that a change in their situation is needed toward an end of liberation.

Post-Pandemic Ministry in 2024 (Additional Competencies)

I chose the Technology/Social Media Management competency because that is the most present way to engage virtually beyond regular church-going and attendance. We should encourage every ministry to have a multi-media presence to conduct ministry services effectively. Every ministry should have access to computers, audio/visual technologies, virtual meeting capabilities, networks, and platforms for social media engagement, including but not limited to the following: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Linked-in, Snapchat, and TikTok. While they should not all have to engage them simultaneously, having access to them is the best way to reach multiple generations simultaneously. Depending on the demographic, different groups within the church could engage in various social media outlets. For example, the adult generations would lean closer to Facebook and YouTube. Likewise, the children, youth,

and young adult ministry would use Snapchat and TikTok. Both generations may be inclined to use Twitter, Instagram, and even Linked In.

Responsible preaching is required to make this project possible and practical. Particular scriptures found in Romans, Leviticus, and other texts traditionally used to oppress women and LGBTQIA folk are not acceptable. I also chose various other competencies to address as I briefly journeyed through this project. Senator, Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock, writes in his text, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, "With the rise of Black theology, Black Christians, both in the Black caucuses of white denominations and in Black denominations, understanding themselves to be heirs to the independent Black church movement, initiated for the first time a self-conscious project of independent theological reflection about the meaning of Christian faith, taking stock of the problem of racism and heresy and declaring war against its maintenance and sacralization of orthodox Christian speech."[32]

I chose additional competencies from which to wrestle, including the Religious/Spiritual Educator competency, because the template developed as a result of this project should have long-lasting effects for organizations beyond the church. The success of this work depends on the ability to duplicate it, not just for movements like UNDRGRND and other established ministries, but all ministries. I chose the Ecumenist competency simply because of the nature of inclusion. During my undergrad and graduate studies, I was trained to think ecumenically, which means that if the ministry could only happen for a selected group of people, then it wasn't ministry because real ministry is not exclusive. It can be targeted, but when a ministry fails to accept someone, it's no longer ministry.

[32] Warnock R. G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*. New York University Press, 2020, 5.

Lastly, I chose the Cultural Proficiency competency because the wave of internet church and online worship requires a particular cultural awareness where ministries can evolve beyond the traditional Sunday morning meeting needs. I hope to see the value in building communities beyond church. The need for the building may not only be for Sunday worship but might also include different types of meeting functions outside of the sanctuary. Should we need more multi-purpose spaces and not sanctuaries built in the future? Perhaps churches should build studios with multi-purpose functions that allow presentations, performances, and worship, as well as banquets, food events, and other gatherings particular to the needs and auxiliaries of the church. These are my competency choices, and they have all informed and served well in developing the overall project.

Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter is an in-depth explanation of the methodologies chosen to complete this work. First, this chapter locates the processes by which the research was conducted. What were the methodologies employed to complete the study? Next, this chapter explains why the sample was chosen. What value does the sample contribute to the work? How was the sample validated?" The final explanation offers justification for how the data will be analyzed and how the analysis of the data was conducted. Finally, this chapter closely aligns itself with scholars who've written extensively on ethnomusicology, African American studies, and performance theory - with performance theory as the general theoretical framework of the work. Scholars like Ashon Crawley, Braxton Shelley, Richard Schechner, Judith Butler, and others are cited as sources for grounding this work in performance theory.

Methodological Justification

To center the topic of the dissertation, a historical approach was used to position the research question in context. Research surrounding Black churches, Black church external movements, frameworks for thinking about holiness (holiness movements), and Pentecostalism was necessary for positioning the central arguments of this work. Given the type of data, this work presents as new evidence/material to support the statements within this paper, a historical overview of how Black churches were established, the sounds of Black music in both secular and

religious spaces, and the historical figures that spearheaded these topics was important groundwork to lay so that the arguments in this work could be made.

A strategic way to accomplish the goal of gathering data was through the process of collecting interviews. This work hopes to offer comments from a professional perspective on the power of musical moments. The more significant characteristic of these moments is that they are recollections taken from first-hand experiences. Beyond the idea that this work employs a qualitative method for collecting data, given the time frame that students in the cohort were granted to complete the project, this was the quickest, most efficient way to gather materials to present in the research. The qualitative method was the fastest, easiest, and best way to collect conversational testimonials as participants recall significant memories that closely align with the topic.

Interviews were the critical, necessary connecting piece that brought theory and practice into conversation with each other. By engaging texts that address similar topics and discussions, the limitations of this work would be significantly enhanced without a sample and set of interview questions for Black creatives, producers, and practitioners. By surveying the data, one might arrive at conclusions about Black art from particular creatives whose impact and imprint have been made on the music/creative industry in very specific ways that otherwise would not be accessible to the general public. If the qualitative method had not been used to complete this work, a quantitative survey would suffice, but only with guided questions for a large sample to engage that gets at the root of feeling when experiencing productions from the sample interviewees.

Sample Selection

Working with each of the creatives sampled in this work was a joy. Not only have each of them made incredibly personal impacts through relationships between themselves and each other, but they have also served as powerful conduits for spiritually euphoric experiences. They are not just creatives who willingly engage art-free, but their investments in their crafts, along with their professional backgrounds in each field, make them unique, insightful, and incredibly influential for this work. Furthermore, they each are professional creatives engaged in the art of "Pentecostalism," as expressed in this work. Their reflections offer worldviews and perspectives into how spiritual experiences happen inside and outside the church. From concert halls to sanctuaries, each creative engaged their memory banks to share testimonials on their spiritual experiences as creatives and recipients of creativity. The following blurb was used to welcome each person to the conversation and introduce them to the interview format:

I hope this message finds you well! Thank you so much for agreeing to assist me with my dissertation research. As I enter my third and final year, I am planning to write my dissertation on how "Black" music (can) create pathways to liberation in the here and now (thinking about how Black church music/sounds have historically influenced popular music by way of artists like Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Little Richard, Otis Redding, and so many others).

I have already had the pleasure of interviewing the Rev. Al Sharpton, who is funding this incredible project! If possible, I would love for you to be a part of my site team, which means I want to conduct one virtual interview with you over Zoom. In our interview, I will ask you

questions about your expertise and experience in Black church, Black music, and popular culture.

Analysis

The data collected from this work is carefully analyzed by three subheadings: performance and background, euphoric experiences as creatives, and strides toward liberation through creative art. Through a series of questions, they offered responses. Each response is categorized into a group that aligns with the question.

The questions asked in the interview are as follows:

1. *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first broadly discover the power of music?*

2. *Tell us your musical background - Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in?*

3. *Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

4. *To your knowledge, can you trace a sound lineage of the creatives you mentioned? Who might they have been influenced by broadly, and are they similarly influential to you?*

5. *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?*

6. *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation?*
7. *How do you see music/art potentially playing a role in the imagined future of the church?*

At the beginning of each conversation, creatives were offered insight into the project format and then asked to introduce themselves for the recording. Once introduced, they were asked a guided question on their background, stating their name, occupation, where they live, and offered a brief survey of their introduction to music broadly. After a few related questions, they were asked to describe moments in their lives where they recalled music powerfully impacting them to the point of euphoria/ecstasy/Pentecostalism. The final questions centered on how they envision the future of the church and church music. Furthermore, how might church music, religious music, or music generally create pathways to liberation?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen for this work fully encompasses an open observation of historical analyses of musical and religious studies fields. It advances notions of practice and

engagement with audiences and the holy. This framework is only intended to bracket the arguments of this work but does not serve as an exhaustive survey of all things about said framework.

Performance Theory

To relate the substance of this work to work scholars who've written on performance theory as a framework for thinking about how religion and spirituality (and the experiences associated with them) are keen examples of performance theory, Braxton Shelley (ethnomusicologist, instrumentalist, and performer) and Ashon Crawley (scholar of African American studies, performer, and, instrumentalist) both offer pathways and examples of the power of Gospel music in direct connection to liberation, euphoria, and ecstasy. Shelley writes in his most notable work *Healing for the Soul, Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination,* "Richard Smallwood takes his time with this treasured tune injecting melodic and harmonic flourishes that push and pull against the audience's collective memory of the hymn's traditional form. At the first iteration of the hymn's refrain, as Smallwood reaches into the highest octaves of the keyboard to play the unsung words "it is well," the camera pans to his mother, Mabel Smallwood, finding her caught up in a fit of praise. As she leans forward, waving her hands and shouting, "Hallelujah," she expresses a belief bound up with Bliss's hymn's text. In between exclamations of religious ecstasy, Mrs. Smallwood voices six knowing words: "It is well with my soul."[33]

Likewise, the work of Ashon Crawley continues offering examples of how performance theory can be interpreted through the lens of religion and the Black church. He says, "Based on a

[33] Braxton D. Shelley. *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 2021, 159.

performance theory analysis, I postulate that not only is the pulpit a stage upon which theatricality is produced but that both preacher and congregation function through call and response, creating a unified-disjointing, harmonic-cacophonous performance. In this context, both the preacher and the congregation confess, comport, and contort their bodies in ways that uplift the importance of and reliance on heteronormative—and, by extension, what I call "homoracist"—tropes of gender and sexuality invoked during her preaching."[34] Crawley, in conversation with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* invokes her work positing that Butler defined gender performance as "The repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[35]

A more in-depth observation of the term performance theory might lead us to the world of theater. Richard Schechner's book *Performance Theory* offers clear guidelines and perspectives for interpreting the theoretical tenants of performance as a discipline. By employing multiple theorists and examples from Greek mythology to Shakespearian works, Schechner's work is a principal foundational text for thinking with the framework of Performance from a theoretical perspective. He says, "The phenomena called either/all 'drama,' 'theater,' 'performance' occur among all the world's peoples and date back as far as historians, archeologists, and anthropologists can go. 1 Evidence indicates that dancing, singing, wearing masks and costumes, impersonating other humans, animals, or supernaturals, acting out stories, presenting time 1 at time 2, isolating and preparing special places and/or times for these presentations, and individual or group preparations or rehearsals are coexistent with the

[34] Crawley, Ashon. "'Lets Get It On!': Performance Theory and Black Pentecostalism." *Black Theology: An International Journal Vol 6,* No 3, Sept. 2008, pp. 308–29.

[35] Ibid, 308.

human condition."[36] He also says, "Clearly, in many situations, the author is also both guru and performer; in some situations, the performer is also the audience. Also, the boundary between the performance and everyday life is shifting and arbitrary, varying greatly from culture to culture and situation to situation. Different cultures mark the boundaries differently. Preparations may begin anywhere from minutes before a performance (an impro-vised guerrilla theater action) to years before (the Hevehe cycle play of the Orokolo, see chapter 2). However, wherever the boundaries are set, it is within the broad region of performance that theater takes place, and at the center of the theater is the script, sometimes the drama. And just as drama may be thought of as a specialized kind of script, so theater can be considered a specialized kind of performance." [37]

When thinking more in-depth about connections between body and spirit and artist and audience, Schechner expounds on the relationship between the two and the complexities of the exchange in performance theory. While reflecting on a play of antiquity, he suggests, "Performers-to-spectator interaction (as opposed to character-to-spectator interaction) was not limited to before the play. During intermission, the performers remained in the playing space….The conversations ranged over many topics, but the themes and style of production were not avoided. There was no attempt to maintain a fictional reality concerning the play. The performers were telling a story by means of theater. In earlier TPG productions, many spectators closely identified the performers with their roles. So much so in Dionysusin 69 and Commune that we were hard-pressed to explain that some of the actions of the plays were not identical to what we did in 'real life.' There is a tendency in orthodox theater to segregate actors from audiences in order to maintain an illusion of, paradoxically, fictional actuality. The need to foster

[36] Richard Schechner. *Performance Theory*. Routledge, 2003, 66.
[37] Ibid, 70

such an illusion is diminishing. Environmental theater certainly fosters fantasies, but these are of a different order than illusionistic make-believe."[38]

For the sake of our argument, let's employ the work of Emma Polyakov, who writes in the *Journal of Ritual Studies* for clarity on the term 'performance,' "The final term that needs to be clarified is 'performance,' for the use of the term in the liturgical context is quite different from its use in the performing arts. A theatrical performance establishes a differentiation between the performers and the audience and uses this division to develop an illusion or to play with the tension between illusion and reality. Even in the case of art forms unconcerned with the illusory nature of theater, such as music, the performers construct a sensory aesthetic structure or situation, which the audience apprehends. While the traditional understanding of performance maintains a distinction between performance and reality and between the performers and the audience, these distinctions are more amorphous in most liturgical celebrations. Echoing this breakdown of distinctions, contemporary performance theory addresses the dissolution of boundaries between the audience and the performers, seeing art to be a performance of reality rather than of illusion." [39] This contemporary understanding of performance comes closer to the use of the term 'performance' in the context of liturgy. For the liturgical performer, the performance of liturgy is an immersion in a profound reality rather than a construction of illusion. It does not represent reality but enacts reality.

Performance, in theory, offers guidance for the questions and the reflections offered in each interview. Each creative was chosen to respond to the interview questions because they have the innovative backing to speak about their experiences growing up and because of their

[38] Ibid, 84

[39] Polyakov, Emma O'Donnell. "Liturgy, Performance Theory, and Aesthetic Experience." Journal of Ritual Studies, vol. 34, no. 2, 2020, 31–40.

ability to perform in the here and now actively. They know what it means to actualize power in a spiritual moment. They've seen transformation happen in gathering spaces beyond the four walls of the church. They each understand their power as creatives and recognize when their abilities have made way for liberation through art.

Extending this work may allow for an expanded sample of creatives embodying Pentecostalism or an expression of euphoria/ecstasy through preaching. What if preachers understood themselves as performers and conduits of creative energy that generates Pentecostalism - resistance against the powers that be, even in the here and now? What if they saw themselves and their words in a way that spoke to the people who heard them? What if their words could be seen, understood, and recognized as pure liberation?

The findings of this work will reveal first-hand accounts and examples of liberation through music and music production. Though creativity within itself cannot be reduced, the term in this work will only reflect the creatives selected for this study and the music they produce. Their testimonials will serve as the primary evidence of art in action toward moments of liberation. Whether they interpret their experiences as liberating or not, they agree that the powers they employ to serve and work their crafts result from God's gifts and recognize their callings in the earth to transform. The testimonials collected only further concretize the initial argument in this work about the power of musical art and production as a means toward transformative powers that bring about liberation.

Aesthetics of "Pentecost" Performance

The characteristics of Pentecost, or a Pentecostal experience, resemble that of gospel song/singing or performance, including vocal acrobatics, call & response, and the different descriptions from Mellonee Burnim and Portia Maultsby's work. They describe the aesthetics of

gospel music in this way, - "As a music that comes to life during performance, traditional gospel resonates with fully embodied timbres emanating from the chest rather than the head, polyrhythms that include hand claps on beats two and four, and movement of the body on beats one and three in duple meter. The dance that so strongly identified the ring shout during slavery is reinvented; the circle is no longer present, but collective movement in synchrony to the music is a mainstay. Singing in harmony, gospel choirs and ensembles most commonly utilize only three parts (SAT— soprano, alto, tenor), which all move in parallel motion. But certainly a most distinguishing factor that characterizes gospel music performance is its melismatic treatment of text— singing several pitches to a single syllable."[40]

By embodying the aesthetics of gospel song singing, the act of conjure or a "stirring up" of sorts is created through sound, motion, emotion, energy, and intent, with an invested hope in transformative liberation as the outcome of the experience. The aesthetics of Black artistic performance (closely aligned with the traditional gospel performance) also includes artistic expressions understood from an African past, which also includes ring shouting, protest, or code language. Lastly, Pentecost is experienced by *conjure*, a type of rhythmic repetition that influences and manipulates the scientific environment around oneself to produce and manifest a tangible change in the here and now found in Albert Raboteau's work, *Slave Religion* and Theophilus Smith's *Conjure Culture*. "The word conjure is not limited to any particular religious belief. Instead, conjure has been known to encompass everything from the practice of Voodoo to Spiritual Churches. It includes innocuous day-to-day individual efforts to control and manipulate the immediate environment. Theophilus Smith argues that conjure is a metaphor for the 'ritual,

[40] Mellonee V. Burnim, and Portia K. Maultsby, *African American Music: An Introduction*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 208.

figural and therapeutic transformations of culture'; or, more simply, conjure is a method of communication, using symbols and symbolic phenomena to interpret, understand, and shape the physical and spiritual world. Further, conjure can be employed as a pharmacopoeic agent as well as a mode of prophecy to help predict or control future events. In other words, conjure is an African method of spiritual agency."[41] By these metrics, one might gauge the power of conjuring as an aesthetic method of artistic expression towards liberation, what this work figuratively describes as a "Pentecost" or "Pentecostal" experience.

[41] Easterling, Paul. "Conjure: Survival of African Religious Structure, Pt. 1 - Definition." Afrometrics. July 2, 2016. http://www.afrometrics.org/africana-religious-studies-series/category/conjure.

Chapter 5 - Findings

This chapter offers material evidence of responses to topics discussed in the previous chapter. Each person interviewed provides insight into their professional experience as a creative artist, professional musician, and spiritualist. This chapter also provides space for the Creative to voice perspectives on engagement with the holy spirit and ideas of euphoria and spiritual power. Lastly, this chapter previews the groundbreaking conversation on disrupting dichotomies about sacred and secular music. Each of these Creatives are incredibly talented and well-accomplished. Their insights provide substantial understanding for thinking about music practice in both spiritual and secular areas. The quotations used in this work stem directly from the words of each Creative. Three amazing themes came to light in each conversation. The themes that arose are Musical Background, Euphoria, and Liberation. The recorded responses are organized by each theme and are analyzed as such.

Conversations with Creatives

In the following conversations, each Creative explores reflections on different topics categorized by the following terms: Musical Background, Euphoria (and Ecstasy & Pentecostalism), and Liberation.

Musical Background

During the interview process, each Creative was asked to share a little bit about their background to situate their responses to the following questions. Understanding their perspectives will allow for ease in the flow of information. When asked, "*What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first discover the power of music, broadly?"* as well as, *"Tell us your musical background - Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?"* Each creative responded with the following:

Dr. Chadwick Brawley

Dr. Chadwick Brawley serves as Worship and Arts Director at The Luke Church, Humble, TX, a megachurch congregation with several thousand members. He is also a graduate of Boston University, a Ministry Consultant, and a Professional Musician. His musical credits include James Fortune & FIYA, Zacardi Cortez, and many others. I first met Chad while interning at the Luke Church during the Summer of my Sophomore year in college at Morehouse. We've remained connected since then. A tenant of our relationship has always engaged in theological discussion and the problems that persist within the Black church. I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Chad on a warm day in August as the sun was setting. My window was cracked to let a slight breeze in. I was in my home. We discussed our topics on a Zoom call, which lasted exactly 47 minutes. Some ideas we discussed were not included in the recording for discretion. Our conversation was lively, natural, and theologically intriguing. Dr.

Chad holds a Doctor of Ministry from Boston University. We rightfully engaged his interests as a scholar-practitioner, as those interests closely align with my work and ministry in Black churches.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first broadly discover the power of music?*

Brawley: "I grew up in different types of churches. I was born into the AME Church. Wesley Chapel AME Church, 2209, Dialing Street, Houston, Texas. Rev. Dr. E. E. Coates was our Pastor and so I was in the AME Church from birth, probably until 5TH grade. The pastor was not very fond of allowing children to play the instruments, which I guess is slightly understandable. If you're not sure if they have a gift, or if they're able to not destroy the instruments. So that being said, I never had an opportunity to play any of the instruments there or to explore anything musical there, but it was there that I first fell in love with music, and watched every move that every musician made, every choir director, every organist, and every classical organist - because, you know, the in AME Church, we did anthems and everything. So I was exposed to all of that very, very early. So the AME church was first, and then in the sixth grade, I got my first paid church job playing piano for the junior choir, basically at Greater St. Matthew Baptist Church. And so ever since then I've been in the Baptist church ultimately. I went to Greater St. Matthew Baptist Church, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, The Luke Church, where I am now, a Baptist Church, and Good Hope Baptist Church, where I was for 13 years. When I was in college, I worked at a United Methodist church for a little while. That was the first church where I actually went into full-time ministry. So that was 1996/97, I went into full-time ministry at that church. Got a full-time job, insurance, and everything. I was still in college! Before that, though, I

worked at the Potter's House for a little while. This was early Potter's House, when Bishop had first gone to Dallas. Before the Potter's House for a period of time, I served in the Church of God in Christ, because it was St. Andrew COGIC Church that I was a member of, and where I served as an early college student. And grew a lot, too. That's when I really got into praise and worship and all that kind of stuff."

Flemming: *Tell us your musical background. Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

Brawley: "So in my canon of people to pull from with regard to excellence in music, you have Myron Butler, you have Kirk's (Franklin) stuff, Donald Lawrence, and all of those are a sound. Each one of these has their own individual type of sound. You have your Ricky Dillard's. James Hall was a major influence. His music has a major influence on me. I love his music. And again, that's another sound, that's a whole different approach. Karen Clark Sheard - specifically the *Finally Karen* album, which Donald Lawrence produced. You gotta love Kim Burrell. Amazing vocalist! I love PJ Morton! I love his writing. I love his music. I love his approach. I love his boldness to say what needs to be said. I think there's more that needs to be said, and I think he may be a person who can say some of it! I love Mali Music, you know! I wish Mali would do more music. But then you have others like L. Spencer Smith, who is an amazing, amazing vocalist who gets no credit, you know, because he's pastoring and doing all that stuff and not focusing on his music. But he is a ridiculously, amazing vocalist! Brandy! How do you go without Brandy? Especially the *Full Moon* record. So you have Brandy. You have Rodney

Jerkins, who was working with her on that on that record. I wish they stayed together. That was a perfect combination! Cannot go without Daryl Coley! Daryl Coley was one of the G.O.A.T.s. Period. Still is, period. Period. His records were great! *When The Music Stops*, was one of my favorite records from Daryl Coley. I love Maxwell, early Maxwell, big hair Maxwell! Yeah! "Pretty Wings" and all that stuff is great, but the old Maxwell stuff was really, really great. I can go on forever! Marvin Sapp, amazing vocalist! What I love about his music, particularly *Diary Of A Psalmist*, is that the vocals are so pristine. The vocals are so well done. The music is so well produced. Kevin Bond and them did a great job!"

"I've learned to really appreciate lack of perfection with some things. I find beauty in flaws a lot now in music. And so some of these artists, when you go back and listen to the music, especially when you go back now with our contemporary ears, but you go back and listen - It's like, 'Oh, that was a mistake,' or 'Oh, that wasn't…..whatever,' but it still is so beautiful. You know it all comes together to make it amazing, because now everything has to be so perfect that it almost feels fake, produced, overproduced. I love classical music. Manhattan Transfer is one of the greatest vocal groups, period. I love Moses Hogan. Glenn Burley! The Spirituals Burley and the Gospels Burley! Beyonce is great. I'm not gonna say that she's influenced my church sound or anything like that, but I just love her music, and I love her level of production, and I love her growth. And so in that way, she's inspired many of us! Who else? I love Brian Courtney Wilson. Good stuff, simple stuff. But yeah, very good, and refreshing, because it's not violently churchy! So I appreciate that about him. Missy Elliot! Back in the day, very influential! Early Missy and Timbaland, and all that stuff! I have a playlist of favorites called "Chad's Happy Place," and so I think through my list. Oh, I love Drake! I'm not doing it in church, but I love the feel. I have over the last, probably 4 or 5 years become a "house head". So I am in love with the Chosen Few

which are the DJs who kind of started House Music in Chicago. I'm in love with house music period, the feel, the beat, the layering, the theoretical context behind it. I don't know if I would say the philosophy of house music, but like the way house music is constructed in layers, and how certain things evoke certain emotions. I might be pushing it if I say a spiritual. But I think there's a spiritual something even up under some of that stuff. It's probably some spiritual up under a lot of the music that I just named!"

Elder Franshun Harris

Elder Franshun Harris is an ordained Elder in the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship founded by Bishop Paul S. Morton. She is also a Worship Leader and Professional Soloist/Psalmist. Her professional collaborations include Richard Smallwood, Lecresia Campbell and members of the local Chicago music scene. One day, as a seminarian in the Forum For Theological Exploration (a ministerial conference hosted in Atlanta), I heard a sweet voice singing and summoning all of the seminarians to chapel service. It was a voice I never forgot. It was Ms. Fran's voice! I immediately reached out to her when I started to think about interviews. I had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Fran over Zoom. Our conversation lasted about 34 minutes. She was returning home from work and entered Zoom via phone. I was resting at home on my computer as we engaged the topics. It was a warm summer day in August. I could not open my window because I wanted to avoid noises from the children playing outside my patio near the pond while we recorded.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first discover the power of music, broadly?*

Harris: “I actually grew up Catholic until I was 16 years old. I've been singing since I was probably five, or six. So as I got older, even though I was attending a Catholic church, I was always asked to sing at various other denominationally affiliated churches, so I was exposed to other experiences beyond Catholicism.”

“So at 16, I asked my mom if I could convert to Baptist, and she said, as long as you stay in church I don't care what you do! So, I converted to a very traditional Baptist church. At the time, I didn't know it was very traditional because the only other reference I had for church experience was Catholicism. So I was at that church for 10 years. Right around the age of about 26, I joined Tribe Stone Baptist Church. I can't remember if it was missionary Baptist, but I know they were Baptist. That was right around the time Full Gospel was coming into fruition, and my pastor, who is now the Midwest Regional Bishop for the Full Gospel Baptist Church, at that time he joined Full Gospel. It was just coming to fruition, and he was state overseer. So I was with him through some transitions, and that church was what helped me understand the difference between very traditional and “more progressive”. So still, at the onset of my joining, and even the onset of being Full Gospel, they still had devotion, but then they eventually brought in praise and worship. So there was both. And then, I think, in the latter years, I'm not sure if they still have devotion, but I know for sure they still have the praise team that I was blessed to be one of their first praise and worship leaders. So I've had kind of a transitions of understanding of Christendom and the church world?”

“When I joined the Baptist Church I was singing, and I've always loved to sing. I've always known that I was a different kind of person, but I didn't understand “call/calling” at that time. Later on, during my tenure with New Israelite Missionary Baptist Church, I became a leader of the Sunshine Choir. I was young and teaching my babies, and I think it was during that

time when I came to understand how much power music had, and how much power I possessed as a psalmist to change atmospheres, and that's kind of where I came to understand."

Flemming: *Tell us your musical background - Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now? To your knowledge, can you trace a sound lineage of the Creatives you mentioned? Who might they have been influenced by broadly and are those folks similarly influential to you?*

Harris: "So my favorite artist, I have so many! First of all, I'll say this. I am a total choir girl. I absolutely love choir music, and while I am young, as it relates to old music, I like going back and listening to James Cleveland and The Caravans. And then Shirley Caesar. All of the pioneers, I'll say the pioneers, generals, as it relates to gospel music. And then bringing it forward. I think CeCe Winans. I'm a worshipper! While I love gospel music, I am also a worship leader. And because, again, one of the primary mantras of Full Gospel is that praise and worship piece. So learning the purpose and power of praise and worship has brought me to really understanding worship music."

"While I'm a total Church girl, Jesus girl, I am called to the margins. I am called to those who've been thrown away. I'm called to those who were deemed unusable by God, and because I have been chosen by the grace of God, I've been told that my voice carries a healing factor! I love singers who have the ability to reach unchurched folk."

“I feel like that about Donnie McClurkin. I admire people who don't mind crossing over. Tasha Cobbs does a great job of that! My list is very vast and very wide, and it also has to do with the seasons in my life. You know, some songs are staples, no matter what. And then some artists, I'm called to depending on what season I'm in. As far as secular artists, Oh, my God! I have a number of those too. But the vocals of Lalah Hathaway do something for my soul. Jill Scott, of course. Again, the pioneers, Aretha Franklin, blessed! Tina Turner! I have such a vast love. I love country music too! My palette is vast! My favorite, though, is just artists that can cross over. That really means a lot to me to be able to use my voice to, as you said, to “gather” and I always want my vocal message to be a simplistic gathering. Like, if you don't understand or know church music and church rhetoric, something I sing can still compel you, and you understand and get the message. I'm drawn to singers like that. I'm gonna say, my ultimate favorite, because I've sung for him, but that is Richard Smallwood! I was talking to Richard one day and I was explaining to him how I was feeling about myself as a singer, and he looked at me, and he said, “You don't have to do all of that. You are a flat-foot singer!” Honey, when he told me that, I was grand for those five minutes. You couldn’t tell me nothing! Richard said it! Listen. I don't care what nobody else says. Richard said it!”

Jon Jon Traxx

Jon Jon Traxx is a Super Producer (credited with multiple major artist collaborations), a professional musician, a multi-instrumentalist, a singer/songwriter, an arranger, and a music director. He is also a Grammy Winner with Stellar Awards/Dove Award nominations. He is a Record Executive and an A&R. His professional credits/collaborations include Beyonce, Jay-Z, Brandy, Chris Brown, Aaron Moses, Ledisi, Bobby Valentino, Jessica Reedy, Janelle Monae,

Tamia, Jidenna, Rodney Jerkins, Warryn Campbell, Gerald Haddon, Tye Tribbett, Erykah Badu and so many others. Jon Jon was the first Super-Producer I'd ever met whose number I could say I had in my phone. I was roughly 14 years old when I discovered he had produced for Beyonce and won a Grammy Award. It was only further confirmed and re-established my desire to become a producer. On a hot day in August, I managed to grab some time on Jon's calendar to chat for 40 minutes and 33 seconds over Zoom in the comfort of my home. He was in and out of meetings then and didn't want to prolong our meeting schedule, so we ensured to be in touch. I cracked the window to let a breeze in and we began recording. It was a hot day in August, and my apartment was rather warm.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first broadly discover the power of music? Tell us your musical background - Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

Jon Jon Traxx: "I was born and raised in COGIC - which is the Church of God in Christ…where you had to learn how to play and sing and all that stuff, you had to learn it all."

"My parents were ministers and musicians, so I learned from them. They put me in spaces and places where I had to learn and teach other kids."

"My Dad always consistently said, "Hey, don't be boastful, always stay grounded, love and respect everyone - even though they are peers and people around you, even younger ones."

"I started when I was three years old in church, playing drums up until I was 14. So I played most of my life on drums. You know that was the start for me. The creative aspect of learning how to play musical instruments, but also understanding the gospel roots, and understanding the hymns, and also understanding what the meaning behind the songs was, like in the gospel choir *and* things like that. That's where I got it from, going up as a kid."

Flemming: *To your knowledge, can you trace a sound lineage of the Creatives you mentioned? Who might they have been influenced by broadly and are those folks similarly influential to you?*

Jon Jon Traxx: "My Father, Uncle, Quincy Jones, Rodney Jerkins, and Pharrell Williams were all influences."

"If it's a track or a song, it's got to be something that has some type…. It's gotta have a feel."

"Hey, how can I make the people move? But all of it comes from church because that's who I am. It's in our DNA."

Lady Brianna Sullivan Sharpe

Lady Brianna Sullivan Sharpe is the First Lady at Fellowship Church Chicago with Pastor Reginald Sharpe, Jr. She is also a Recording Artist, a Choir Director, and a student at

Chicago Theological Seminary. Her professional collaborations include John P. Kee, BET's Sunday Best, and Melvin Crispell. Lady Bri's interview was my first interview for this project. I was overjoyed and excited to be beginning this process. Everything we discussed during the conversation confirmed that I was on the right track, that my interests were aligned, and this was indeed becoming my passion project. We talked for 41 minutes. I was in my office at Harvard Business School, rounding out the day with emails, communications, and meetings. Lady Bri joined me from her home in Chicago after a meeting at the church. We began interviews in July, so it was hot where I was, but our recording was inside the office. I could smell the coffee I'd made before the interview to boost my caffeine. I teared up at some points in the conversation because I connected so deeply to some of Bri's sentiments. In addition, we reminisced on our days at Morehouse College, where I was an undergraduate, and she was the MLK Chapel Gospel Choir Director, a choir I joined my freshman year!

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first broadly discover the power of music? Tell us your musical background. Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

Sullivan Sharpe: "I have been Baptist all my life. So I think my first discovery of the power of music definitely came from the church because that's where I was born; that was my first introduction to music."

"Just to see the pomp and circumstance of the choirs marching in in their robes, I mean having choreography, all the things going to the choir stand and singing. I remember, as a little girl, just watching how their ministry influenced the crowd. So that's when I realized, like, okay, this music thing, something is happening. It does something to people's souls and your experience."

"When I first saw *Sister Act 2*! It was the moment when Lauryn Hill starts singing 'Joyful Joyful'….I had never heard anybody sing like that. It touched me, and it resonated deeply with me that I started to mimic, like I wanted to sing like her."

"Yeah. So, I have to start off with my guy PJ Morton. It's very deep for me! He is ultimately one of my favorite artists!"

"And then the church background! PJ, he's church! That's where he comes from. So, although he's singing R&B, he's going to add that church element to it, and I just love it…He is our modern-day Stevie Wonder!"

Flemming: *To your knowledge, can you trace a sound lineage of the Creatives you mentioned? Who might they have been influenced by broadly, and are those folks similarly influential to you? Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?*

Sullivan Sharpe: “So Reggie [Pastor Reginald Sharpe, Jr.] has this remake to (the song) ‘God Is.’ And it's very like this African beat and sound to it, and every time he starts to quote this song, and the musicians start to play, it's like the church; we tense up because we know what's about to happen! It's about to be an explosion. And sure enough, once we get into the thick of the song, it is an explosion. You see the women. They start coming to the front, and they're dancing. They're doing this bop (movement), and it's like our African heritage is coming up. It has been tapped in, and now it's coming up. You see the women grab and the tambourines! What I love about Chicago - because Chicago is so rich in Black music, Black church music specifically, since we're talking about that - you see, people bringing up washboards and whatever they can grab. And it's that African culture that was born already planted inside us. It comes up, and everybody is just bumping, and the whole church is just we’re all rocking! And some people may not have rhythm, but it's like a heartbeat. It's happening in the sanctuary as we are worshipping, as we are singing, as we're giving praises to God, and it's just it's so magical and powerful.”

David “Swagg R’Celious” Harris

David “Swagg R’Celious” Harris is a Super Producer, a Professional Musician, a Multi-Instrumentalist, a Singer/Songwriter, an Arranger, a Music Director, a multi-Grammy Winner, a Record Executive, an A&R, and a Professor at New York University and Berklee College of Music. His professional credits/collaborations include H.E.R., Kehlani, K. Michelle, Tone Stith, Snoh Aalegra, Babyface, Teyana Taylor, Zhavia Ward, Wale, Rotimi, and many others. I met Swagg (born David Arcelious Harris) a few years ago through a mutual musician friend who asked if I knew the artist, H.E.R. I told the friend that I did and that she was my favorite artist. After listening to some recent music I shared with him, he said I could meet the guy who

produced H.E.R. I was immediately inspired with many questions. Swagg took me on as a student and, years later, graciously offered his time and insights to my project, a topic he just so happens to teach at his alma mater, New York University. We chatted for about 38 minutes and 13 seconds. I was in my office at HBS over the summer. He was at his home in Connecticut.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first broadly discover the power of music? Tell us your musical background. Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

Swagg: "I have to start with Church. I am a Pastor's Kid. I come from a big family. I have seven siblings. I am the seventh of eight. I have four brothers and three sisters. The power of music really gripped my heart, I say, really discovering it in church. Just seeing how people would emote and how music in our setting would touch people's hearts, and I just wanted to be a part of that at a very young age. My family had a gospel group growing up and I just wanted to be a part of that at the age of 8, you know, asking and begging and trying to be a part of the group because I saw the effect music had on people."

"Soul artists from Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, Al Green, Wilson Picket, The Temptations and in Hip Hop - Jay-Z, Pharrell Williams, Kanye West. On the Pop side, Travis Scott, Billie Elish, Maren Morris, Billy Holland, The Big Bopper, Louis Jordan, Little Richard, James Brown.

Christian Contemporary Artists Michael W. Smith, Jesus Culture, Maverick City, Mary Mary, Kirk Franklin, Yolanda Adams….The list goes on and on!“

“All of Western popular music hinges on the back of Black music. I think we are all influenced by the Black experience and popular music to be quite honest. And most artists who I get in with, even if they don't have a church background. The artists they listen to, either from the church, or you know, their uncle, or their auntie was a pastor or missionary, or something.”

“Black music to me is not genre specific. It's an experience!.... In content, you have secular and sacred, right? But as far as musical experience for me, It's just Black - It's part of the Black experience!”

“We become what we listen to. It could be artists, or it could be the environment.”

“I think with Brown and Black artists, specifically, it's in our genealogy anyway. So we are able to tap into that place like that experience, passed down,”

“My son comes home and wants to listen to Willie Neal Johnson and the (Fantastic) Violinaires and he’s not even 2 (years old) yet but that's all he listens to….And I find it fascinating because it's like, man! This is not even your era or your experience, perse, but there’s something spiritually and culturally that's pulling on you to identify with this music.”

Joshuah Campbell

Joshuah Campbell is an ordained AME Zion Clergy, a Harvard College graduate and French Speaker, a Singer-Songwriter, a Worship and Arts Director at Wake Forest University, a Vocalist, a Critically Acclaimed Recording Artist, an Academy Award, Grammy, Golden Globe, Critics Choice, and NAACP Image Award Nominee. His professional credits include "Stand Up," a song from the film *Harriet* (songwriter/composer) with Cynthia Erivo, and "Sing Out, March On" (songwriter/composer) performed at Harvard College in tribute to Congressman John Lewis. I met Joshuah after he had recently graduated from Harvard College and while I was an MDiv student at the Divinity School. We immediately connected like Southern boys born in a similar place in the South. Our initial conversation lasted over the course of several hours and likewise, our interview for the project was headed in that direction. For the sake of time, we met for 57 minutes and 16 seconds over zoom, trying our best to remain focused on the topic while also drawing insights from one another. I was at my home desk, and so was he. Once he realized we were recording, he asked for moment to prep because I hadn't given him fair warning. His was one of the last interviews of the series. It wasn't as warm that day. I was wearing warm clothing during the recording.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first discover the power of music, broadly? Tell us your musical background. Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?*

Campbell: “My mantra these days has been I'm not as good as I'm going to get yet.”

“80-85 percent of what I know about music, I learned in the AME Zion church.”

“They would stand me on a box….’I Got My Mind Made Up to Serve the Lord,’ and that was the first song I sang in front of people…and thereby learned how to perform…because I think ‘performance’ does happen in religious spaces.”

“Traditional Protestant hymnody, African American spirituals and freedom songs, traditional gospel, southern gospel….praise, and worship. This fusion was a part of my life’s sort of liturgical upbringing from my home church and from my experiences.”

“I was also surrounded. I just come from a singing church. Everybody at my church sings. It is just a musically very strong church. I have always been grateful for that as well.

(On the topic of performance etiquette) “We were even taught how to hold the Hymnals in church, like how to stand, like how to do it. And that just speaks to how much of a formation, a musical formation Black Church really was for me, and it was for a lot of people!”

“Lee Williams, The Williams Brothers, Dixie Hummingbirds - These were folks I just came to love over life when I went back and realized, oh, that's who that was…I’m also just into choirs like Kevin Lemons; I just love choirs!.... I just have a deep affinity, for, like the New York sound, the Love Crusade/Love Fellowship sound, the Vincent Bohanan sound which comes out

of institutional radio choir sound from like the 50s and 60s onward, right? And out of that, you also get the James Hall sound, right? They are just deeply important to me. Related to that, I'm just a big fan of Melvin Crispell II as a songwriter. And a choir leader. It's interesting. The names that come to me are people who occupy that like middle space, like you know how I feel about Aaron Marcellus's voice, one of my favorite voices of all time, people who just sound really churchy. Lawrence Flowers, just like that type of voice is really appealing to me. And then some people I listen to, who, I guess, are not "sacred" music-like Laura Mvula is one of my favorite songwriters of all time. I'm really, and I mean this seriously, like, I'm really a fan of Beyonce and not like the stand sense. But I think what she's able to do vocally as a performer, I think we just really can glean - anybody can glean from that. I'm the audience for which "Church Girl" was written. Like some people say, 'I don't know why 'Church Girl' was on this album. It wasn't for you to get, right? It wasn't for you! And then there's like my vocal jazz side. I really adore Betty Carter and Carmen McRae, and Sarah Vaughn was my first favorite singer of all time. Andy Bey! It's kind of all over the map for me. As you said, it's rather eclectic, but does come down to gospel music and sacred music. I'm such a choir sound person. I also love Chicago music like the Cosmo records, Greater Harvest, and Fellowship. I love it!"

"Beyonce. The performative lineage I think, when I think about her as a choreosonic artifact on stage, before me I draw this line, obviously front of mind most recently, to Tina Turner, and I draw a line to Josephine Baker as well. Even when you think about like the way in which Josephine Baker was inhabiting these worlds, transatlantic-ly. I think the global appeal of a Beyonce is related to that as an ancestor. I think vocally, we have to think of Beyonce's vocal. And I can't speak historically about it, how much its directly affected by this, but like, I think

about Texas. I think there's like a particular lineage of gospel that comes out of Texas that's Southeast, inspirational Choir and Yolanda Adams, Brenda Waters, Brenda Colin Shirley, the Church of God in Christ in Texas General Bettye Ransom Nelson right? Like that vocal ecosystem, I think makes Beyonce a vocalist in a very interesting way."

Professor Braxton Shelley

Professor Braxton Shelley is a Minister, Musician, Musicologist, Recording Artist, Associate Professor of Music, Sacred Music, and Divinity at Yale University, where he is also Director of the Program in Music and the Black Church. He is the author of *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination*. His professional collaborations included Richard Smallwood, Kurt Carr, and the Clark Sisters. I first met Dr. Shelley as a student at Harvard Divinity School. He was an incoming Professor in Cambridge. I took his class on "The Gospel Imagination" through the music department. It was an incredible class, if for no other reason than the chance of a lifetime, to meet and host Richard Smallwood at Harvard University for the first time. When I reached out to Professor Shelley, he was eager to talk via Zoom as he's long supported my endeavors to further pursue graduate study after my master's. I managed to get a Zoom meeting with him midday while at work. We chatted for 38 minutes and 23 seconds. I closed my office door to begin the meeting while he was on sabbatical at his home in Connecticut. His interview opened a gateway to many theoretical interests and concluding thoughts for this work. His interview was the final interview.

Flemming: *Tell us your name, the city you're located in, and your occupation. What type of church did you grow up in? Where did you first discover the power of music, broadly? Tell us your musical background. Your introduction to "Black" Music - did you start in church? What*

city did you grow up in? Who are some of your favorite artists? Gospel and Non-Gospel? What songs and musical sounds/styles shaped you as a Creative? What artists (specifically) influenced the music you make now?

Shelley: "I grew up in Eastern North Carolina, a town, called Rocky Mount. And I, as a musician spent time in multiple churches. The church I was baptized and a member of in my early life, New Hope Mission Baptist Church, in Dunbar [in the country]. A drive 15 minutes through tobacco and cotton fields. Cross a couple of bridges that probably shouldn't be bridges still and you turn left and then there you are. The church called, "the friendly church by the side of the road." And churches like that, you know, come out of, you know when people are still living on farms, and so they, you know, were out there in the country then, and then over the course attempted to move into the city, you know. But the church didn't move so they had to go back out to the country. And so I remember hearing devotional services, where people would just start singing songs off the top of their heads. Then the choirs. You know, youth choir, Senior Choir. Inspirational choir. Male Chorus. Rocky Mount is an interesting town, you know. All the choirs sing, you know. Interesting kinds of stuff off the radio, Margaret Dorough. 'One More Day', 'He Decided To Die', that kind of stuff, but also is quartet country. You know. These are the churches. In fact, the first Church I was minister of music at, is the church where Luther Barnes's father, F.C. Barnes grew up in there in the 50s. So quartet heavy, you know, not just the sort of nationally known recording artists, F.C. Barnes and Company and Luther Barnes and the Sunset Jubilaires, but everybody got their own little quartet group. Something so many people love. And so choirs sing that music. You know the Senior choir. Luther had a song, 'Jesus Cares'. He calls it a 'Choir-tet' song. Yeah, it's kind of like I grew up hearing. So, you know. Interesting stuff - hymns. Sort of standard Gospel Choir repertoire. Yeah. But also like quartet was there. So those

drive sections. You know the vamp where you got a soloist kind of pushing the song forward. I remember Deacon Charlie Burgess. God rest his soul! He would sing Dorothy Love Coates's 'Holding On, And I Won't Let Go Of My Faith.' [reciting] 'I remember the day, I remember the hour the Lord save me with his holy power, which could have been that when I came through the church was on fire with the holy ghost too… I've been changed. The angels in heaven done signed my name! And he put running in my feet clapping in my hand.' Love it! 'My heart, took doubt from my mind. Oh, no, I won't let go. No, no, I won't let go.' He would drive that vamp. I mean, for 20 minutes would just be 'holding on to my faith.' Yeah, he was every bit of an MC, right, you know? The rhythm and the cadence, and all of that, anyway. So I learned then the value of the vamp. I learned from that how the right soloists could just drive that thing and not let you off until he was ready."

"I also learned about the relationship between the preaching and music in that same space. I remember when I played for them, my grandmother's church, even after I had gone, and I was playing another church in Rocky Mount, The Church of the Open Door Baptist. One time they had to go out of town, and their musician couldn't go, so they hired me to go with them and play for them at this Pastor's anniversary in Laurinburg with like about a two hour drive. And I remember actually noticing that Deacon Charlie sang his song for the sermon, and then, when Reverend Clements got ready to finish his sermon, he preached about the word, and he closed with the word, and I remember he had this little book where he had written down all the things about how powerful the word was. The word is so powerful this can't happen, and that can't happen. Michael Jordan can't dunk it. And this is 2001. So you know, this is still back in that era, he said, 'Oprah, the word is so powerful! Oprah can talk about it,' you know. But I remember

noticing how, at a cultural level, a sonic level, what the vamp was doing in the song, the close of the sermon, was doing the same thing. And really, my whole career kind of comes out of that, attending to that. you know, interface of word, music, song, and sermon, and all that kind of stuff."

Euphoria

The diversity of professional perspectives spans a wide range of experience and history within creative industries. Each Creative offered commentary on how Euphoria as a general theme that shows up in the creative space. When asked about Euphoria's role in each Creative's experiences, the following comments stuck out the most.

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?*

Swagg: "One of the mothers in the church was engaged in what we call Testimony service. She was talking about her life, the things she's been through, and where God has brought her. And she burst out in this song. She didn't have the prettiest voice. She didn't have the most theoretical approach to singing. But it's a song she sang, 'I Cannot Fail the Lord.' And that moment, the chills! It's like, what is happening? But it wasn't necessarily about being so technical - which is something I share with vocalists working with them as a vocal producer. Sometimes it's about being convinced of what you're singing yourself. And the emotion that's happening to the lyric that you're singing about. The chills and the memory, it's a fresh memory for me to this day just how

convicted she was and what she was singing! She didn't care if she was in tune or if she was hitting the right notes. She believed what she was singing. It meant something to her, so it touched everybody, and I remember the whole church environment, doing what we call catching on fire. This crazy Pentecostal experience happened where it became contagious. By the time she got to the second stanza of whatever she was singing, the congregation was singing, and other people were falling out and crying. That moment taught me! It was such a euphoric, transformative spiritual experience - and just the euphoria of like, wow! Experiencing this music penetrated my heart when I was young and tattooed in my head that memory to this day so that every time I hear that song, I hear her voice."

"The first time I heard 'How Does It Feel' by D'Angelo, it was such a rush and high from that song. I'm like, what is this? It's like it gave me the feeling of gospel; it was soulful, it was R&B, it was cutting edge, and I was obsessed with that song."

"Our music was not looking to be commercialized. The industrialization of our sound found us and then we realized we had a part to play and that our "Intellectual property had value."

"Speaking from a creative perspective, you know. James Brown was just doing what he felt good to him. He was not trying to be the foundation of Hip-Hop."

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria,*

transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?

Harris: "I think the story that comes to mind is when I was blessed to receive the gift of tongues. I was in my late twenties. And I was singing a song that is dear to me because this person is dear to me. I've worked with her, and I was blessed to know her; I was working with her when she died, which is Lecresia Campbell. She sang this song with Wilmington Chester Mass Choir called 'Until Your Will is Clear.' And I was leading that song as a guest soloist with a church choir, and that moment for me was just like, I feel like the heavens opened and God said, 'I have designed this moment for you. And I'm going to bless you in the midst of your vocal ministry. I'm going to bless you with this powerful gift that will take you even further, not only in your vocal ministry but in your ministry life period. In your Christian walk period. And when I tell you, I lost it. It was like an out-of-body experience. And that was the moment that I received the gift of tongues in the midst of my singing 'Until Your Will Is Clear.'"

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?*

Jon Jon: "When it happened, I got into this Pop world, you know, Beyonce, Jay-Z, Chris Brown, Brandy, and Ray J, all these different artists I'm working with at the time most of my career, it was like, well, I got to be able to try to, not fit in it, but try to learn and grow at the same time so I can learn and be a better me. Because I mean at that time I was coming up in the eighties. So a

lot of churches or churches in general in our community weren't talking about business, music business, or how to take care of your paperwork. I didn't have that type of background. So I had to, you know, go to school for a little bit at TSU [Texas Southern University]. I went to Houston before I made it and tried to learn as I went. I was growing within that time but when I "made it", I still didn't have the business side of it."

"When I made it, (achieved success) it wasn't enough….I still had to sustain that standard of excellence. I said, 'I got here. Now I have to keep this going.' How can I stay here in this rhythm because now everyone is expecting me to produce that sound or a certain sound for them? But that sound is one that comes from my background in church. Bass, keys, organ, drums, piano, etc."

"Even a lot of the bands, R&B bands, and all these Pop artists of the last 3 to 4 decades, going back to Prince and Michael Jackson, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin, come from church. It's a sound that's in us. It's a soul God is putting inside us from church roots. A lot of the records that are out there are Gospel influenced."

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape?*

Brawley: "So, back to the euphoric moment. One really euphoric moment was when I was in Rome. I did a Gospel Choir workshop in Rome, Italy. And I forgot the occasion, but whatever

the occasion was, it was like a big deal in Rome, like it was a big occasion. I don't know if it was one of their holidays or whatever the case was. But, I had done a workshop there, and I taught them. I think I taught them 'Greater,' or one of my songs on the record, I think it was 'Greater.' and we were in this big Colosseum. Thousands of people were there. You know, not like 30,000 or nothing but I mean, it was a lot of people. And so to be able to sing that song in front of those people and they respond particularly, you know - because we were singing in English. So that goes to show you how music can transcend even language. But I taught the song in English, and they were singing in an English kind of with an Italian accent. But I mean the people in the audience. Some knew what we were singing, some didn't, but people responded a certain way, and being on that stage in that space with that type of response in those people and just that feeling of music that's mine, that was an amazing experience."

"Other euphoric experiences have been those times when I had the opportunity to play with other musicians who are amazing, whether I was on organ or keys but playing in a situation, maybe a band situation, with people who are mature and really musically savvy and strong and it just clicks and it works and everything locks. That is an amazing feeling for me. It's amazing, you know! And so there have been a number of both times when that has happened. Also, a wonderful euphoric special feeling for me has been when I've been directing the choir. Two things. One is directing the choir on a Sunday and it goes really, really well. And by 'goes well,' I'm talking about the whole thing. So the music is strong and they're singing well and the band is doing well. The mix is good. And then the message seems to be getting across because the people are responding in a particular way. I'm certainly not ridiculous enough to think that people only receive what you present if they're shouting and screaming because I know that's not

the truth, in fact, is sometimes far from that, it's the opposite. Some people are very contemplative and may sit down and just listen. Give me that any day, you know. Bring your brain. I'm a proponent of bringing your brain to church, all right. So you know we don't do that too often. Or not often enough, let me say that. But those have been very euphoric times for me."

"When I'm able to just get lost in the music, when I'm able to let the music control my vibe which means that I have to bring a certain personal freedom to the space, so that I can be free to receive the music and let it in. If I'm worried about stuff or have things going on, or my mind is cluttered, it's a very different experience than when I'm free in mind, free in heart, free in spirit, and just able to really just vibe and just enjoy the music, that's amazing to me. And when I'm able to do that in community, that's even better. So for instance, in Houston, we have a place called The Flat, which is a house spot. This past weekend, I was able to go to Chicago, to the Chosen Few Festival and it was amazing being around 40,000 or more people who were all 'House Heads' and the DJs were all ridiculous. The sound system is great, and you have 40,000 people on a lawn vibing to house music, all in their own way. That's another thing about house music it's very spiritual, I guess, the freedom that it brings. There's no indoctrination there. There's no 'You have to do this, you have to feel this,' you know. It's very free. It's very freeing. People bring to it what they want. You may have some person standing up against the wall while you may have another person doing a whole ballroom dance over here, or a House-Ball scene situation over here. You may have some people over here doing their thing. Everybody's just so free. And the music lends itself to that because it's not too complex. So it's not all over the place, which is a problem that we have with church music, sometimes. The music breathes enough to where you can receive it, and you can breathe and communicate. There's a dialogue that goes

back and forth, I would say. Between the DJ and the Room! It's a lot like church, It's a lot like church!"

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape you?*

Campbell: "I went to a Youth and Young Adult Revival at this church called B.A.L.C.O.M. [Beginning A New Life Changing Outreach Ministries Inc.]. Literally storefront! This is the church where you know Elder Jacobs from Instagram. This is the church where he attends. He was on the road, unfortunately, so we didn't get to worship with the Elder himself, but I was there for two nights, and we were there for at least three and a half hours. Both nights. It was loud, it was brash, it was Carolinas! It was cow bells. It was washboards. It was tambourines. I probably lost my mind two or three times, just because I hadn't been in that kind of space in a long time. Especially not since the pandemic has been here - like where it was just packed out. People are sweating through suits like, it was just really good church. And I think in those moments you're able to embody downloads of things, and you're able to experience revelations. I know I'm using churchy words. But this is actually what I mean. Like you, you're actually able to embrace and experience knowledges and things that you need in a way that only that kind of space can provide. It almost becomes an epistemological relationship. These communal ways of knowing through worship, I think those highly charismatic Pentecostal worship settings, like the dancing and the ecstatic worship becomes a way of knowing, a way of understanding and interpreting reality, especially the ways in which reality is like unrelentingly, incomprehensibly

violent for Black people - especially Black, queer people to boot. I would name that, for sure as well. Violence that people might not be experiencing consciously, but that is probably happening to their bodies subconsciously. It reminds me of, like this word that we learned in Ethnomusicology from the Arabic song traditions, "TARAB" (referenced in the terms section) to which is like this moment of like, almost out-of-body ecstasy that one experiences, that one hears music being performed in a certain way that, like triggers, and it elicits a certain kind of response. So like it's definitely almost like a one-to-one kind of thing, like when a certain cord gets hit, or we move to four, or the drive switches, or we go to the symbols and like it, triggers an immediate like, bodily, like, corporeal, soul level response at the same time."

Flemming: *Can you describe the emotion/feeling that music provides you and others you've played for in and out of churches? Are there any stories you recall of visible euphoria, transformation, or liberation you've witnessed happening to someone through music? What was the setting? How did the moment shape you?*

Shelley: "I remember listening to… I didn't even know who the song was. I didn't know who the composer was, but on the Wow! Gospel 2002 CD. That was a good CD. Man! Those CDs were really, that was a heyday, the Gospel music going in the 90s, the 80s and 90s. Those were some gems. But I would work-out back in the days of CD players, and that was stuck in my machine, and I would listen to it as I was working out. Dottie People's 'God Can, God Will' is up there, 'There's A Strong Man In This House' by Shirley Caesar is up there. 'We Worship You' by Fred Hammond is up there! These memories are just indelible. Carlton Pearson's 'I Know The Lord Will Make A Way' there from one of his Azusa recordings. And Richard Smallwood's 'Healing.' And I didn't even know who it was. I just know the song talks about, "The Lord gave

me the song in a dream, and when I woke up I had a healing song cause I was going through some spiritual pain of my own," you know. I was just stuck, by like what they keep saying, "There is a balm in Gilead." And in some way, by the last time they say it, I'm more convinced than the first time, right? What is repetition doing here? That was the question. Not saying that I could articulate the question. I couldn't. But I think I was struck by like that moment, and then goes up in the falsetto and screams, and then come back. "There is a balm in Gilead, for there is a balm in Gilead," and again he starts whooping. Isaiah 53! "Listen, he was wounded for our transgressions, the word of God says, and not only that the one that but he was bruised for our iniquity, the chastisement of our peace…" you know. "And with his stripes!" Anyway, it's a very interesting moment that I keep coming back to and I never got away from it. I went to college. Wrote a senior's honors thesis with Richard at the center of it. The paper that got me into graduate school was about Black preaching, gospel music, and 'Healing' was the sort of object of study."

"I did a dissertation that had 'Healing' at the center of one of the chapters. But the title of the dissertation was "Sermons In Song." And then, when I got to Harvard, I was like, what am I doing with this first book? What's this book really about? You know, because you gotta make the dissertation not be the book, right? You gotta have space and demonstrate some intellectual maturation. And then, where the hell did I go? Back to the first book, the title is Healing for the Soul, right? And so you're talking about like almost a 20-year trajectory from 2002 Gospel. As far as listening to it in 2004 and 2005 and 2006, to 2021, the book comes out! But I think a lot of scholars who I talk to have a similar experience of being almost haunted by an idea, you know. That it'll take you a decade to really finish struggling with it. Right? Or for it to finish struggling

with you. And so beneath that, then another sort of similarly extensive trajectory, listening to G.E. Patterson, at my grandmother's house in the 90s, I mean, I just was fascinated with the dude. I remember in seventh grade, in North Carolina, you have a State Writing Test. And we had to do practice mock writing tests. And one of them said to write a mock biography. And in the seventh grade, I wrote a paper about G.E. Patterson. That was like 2001 or something. I just was like taken. I mean, we watched all the people on TBN. You know, on Sundays. But what he was up to? Well, somehow, I recognized it to be different, and I remember this moment, probably in 2001 or 2002. He was preaching about Jehoshaphat's battle against Anon & Moab on Mount Sier. And I remember less about the sermon's context than the song he sang. He sang his own version of the song described in the text. "Praise the Lord for his mercy endures forever," - fall down an octave. And, to tell you the truth, I was on a hunch for that song, for that thing, for the next 16 or 17 years, because, you know, I started watching YouTube. But YouTube started in like 2004, and Patterson's videos are up there. But there is no evidence of that video. And it wasn't until 2020, August 2020, I moved to Chicago for the pandemic. I set up my computer and said, "Let's see what the Patterson broadcast is today!" Because, you know, I've watched all the Patterson stuff from March to July. You know, all the "Pandy," I had nothing else to do. So I watched everything on Youtube like 12 times. And that day I was in the kitchen and I had the thing playing. I almost tore the kitchen up trying to get back, because my memory - I have this is a sort of photographic quality to my memory, where, if I hear something, I can kind of recite it across years. And I heard him heading back to that moment. There it was! The Sermon and that song from August 16, 2001, interesting. And it was like round about August 16, 2020. It was almost exact. And he preached "Dealing with Life's Battles", and he did his whole thing, and that line that I had remembered, "Praise the Lord for his mercy endures forever." It

came back up again. And it was another moment of transition cause I was working on a digital culture project. I was going to write a book about 'memes' which I'm working on now. I was going to save Patterson for later. But something about that moment of being gripped by the familiar sound redirected me. I've wrote about this actually, in the preface for the book that's coming out (Nov 2023). But I talk about how hearing that familiar sound again, that repetitive musical sound, Patterson is over the course of the many decades of his life, he repeated few musical fragments over, and you know them. And those fragments sort of collectively embody what I call Patterson's eternal pitch, which is what the book is about….If the first book is about how the vamp pulls in Black preaching. With G.E. Patterson, you get to see how Patterson's preaching pulls in the vamp. But a different way, not just within a musical event, a homologic event, not just on one day, but in a transcendent fashion. Because every time you hear (the tuning sound) right, you're not just hearing it right in the instant, right? Oh, you're hearing the chorus. The asynchronous kind of Eternal song, right? ….To me I see in that moment Patterson's tapping in, right, to something else. But I call it the eternal transmission of sacred writ. That's his thing, you know. He's got this impressive memory. He can recall all the Bible, "Obidiah Chapter one down around verse 33, it says so and so, you know. To me, that's about fidelity, you know, not just in the sense of faithfulness, but fidelity as a technological term, right? He's a conduit, a vehicle, or an instrument. Which for me relates to the prayer he prayed almost every time we got ready to preach right? "Anoint these lips of clay, allowing us to speak as an oracle of Christ," to me all those things fit together. And so the centrality of music to Black religion, to Black culture by extension - or maybe the way to flip it is the centrality of Black religion to Black culture, even and especially when that influence is not one people want to name. And I think it's because of this persistent need, right, to have something with which to critique the world that is. To have

something to tell the powers that be that they are not all that is, right? Consequently, they are not eternal, and won't have the last say, final word, and so forth and so on. And is not so much about a theological treatise. Like, Aretha's not giving you one. She's not literally trying to read you the lecture that she wrote, right. The wisdom is in the sound, right? And in (tuning sound).....There's a whole theory of religion right, in those 2 seconds. If you listen to it and return, spread it out. It is theory, right? And you know, people talk about that. Ashon [Crawley] talks about the sort of aesthetic of possibility, Black Pentecostal Aesthetic Practices that are about an ongoing affront to white supremacy, normative logics of various kinds. But James Cone, same thing when he says that you know, "The truth of Black religion is not just in the words, but it's in sound, and the hum and in the tune, in the shout. When those things bring about creation, bring about connection between the created and Creator. So that, like the seriousness with which Black believers approach sound makes it such a fertile generative place from which to create. And it's very, even when people leave the church, even if they renounce the religion, a sensibility is maintained."

"Yeah, I was listening to Beyonce's 'Love on Top'. I was like, "Come on modulation." It's just church, you know. It's praise and worship. [Singing:] "Oh, He reigns forever, [modulates] Oh, He reigns forever, [modulates] Oh, He reigns forever." You know? Then there's, "You put my love on top," you know. I mean, so there's like text painting that's happening with the music doing what the words are about. But the license for it, you know. I think that's the thing. Artists are always about expressing freedom and creativity, we all need license right? Like we all are comparing and contrasting to the broader aesthetic field. And I think, though, the license to be relentless with sound is a gift to the Black church, right? And I mean Nina Simone grew up playing the piano for her Methodist and Pentecostal mother. Think

she forgot? You know Nina Simone's upbringing is not that different from Mattie Moss Clark's upbringing, you know. Bishop Flunder, and so forth, and so on, you know. I love Fantasia, not just because she's in North Carolina, but like she makes that strong assertion that you know the sort of binary some folks deposit between sacred and secular doesn't obtain here. It was a meme about it. Somebody, I mean, it was on TikTok or Instagram. I forgot, but somebody posted a meme of Fantasia starting off doing her stuff and then ending up on her knees crying "Total Praise." It's the syntax of her programs. But the point is, who was Aretha Franklin singing about when she said, "I never loved a man like I love you," and goes and whoops at the end of her song, right? A very old tradition of loving the divine. So, it's complicated!"

Liberation

Creatives engaged in this survey were asked to offer reflections on moments they experienced and categorized as liberation. They were also encouraged to think about the ways in which liberation can be developed in the future of Black religious traditions through music.

Flemming: *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation? How do you see music/art potentially playing a role in the imagined future of the church?*

Brawley: "I think freedom in "church" is typically is measured by an emotional response. My thing is that it's not the only thing and I think it is largely cultural. Whether that's the church culture, or whether this, you know, culture as far as your community, your ethnicity, all those kinds of things, or whether it's a denominational culture. But, I think there is definitely a cultural influence that plays a role in what is considered "freedom." Personally, in some ways, I wish we

would just throw it all out the window. I think much of our theology needs to be thrown out the window. I think much, of our theology is very restrictive, very antiquated, very a whole lot of things. And so this ultimate freedom that you speak of, I think will eventually come when the Church is willing to say we got some things wrong. When the church is willing to say, 'Oh, we don't know everything', you know. We weren't there when God wrote the whole Bible by hand, and then emailed it to a publisher and sent it to us. You know, when the Church admits that all of that is not what happened. When the Church admits that we need to reconsider some things theologically and that we need to reconsider some things as far as doctrine. You know, when the Church admits that doctrine is not necessarily divine. You know all these kinds of things need to happen, wholistically. Now, in the musical space, I think musically, lyrics play a large part. I think it's layered. So I think, first of all, at least for me as a Worship Pastor, from my seat and a consultant, from my seat, I often look at lyrics first, because I want to know what are we talking about? So I will exegete the lyrics, you know, to kind of find out, what is this all really talking about? What theology are we sharing with the people? And when you do that, depending on where your theology is, you will find, I think your personal theology will determine how much of gospel music you can really stand, you know, if your personal theology is really liberal and kind of open. But if your theology is there, a lot of gospel music is going to get on your nerves because it is so "Us" based, it's so 'slave' and plantation-based. It's so colonized. It's so manipulative of ourselves and God. And it's manipulative of the congregation as well."

"All of these things are true, you know. But here's the challenge. Here's the thing for those of us who are in charge of music and stuff. We have to realize that we are contributing to the madness by the stuff that we present. Because we're not considering lyrics. We're just doing

stuff that's ‘Top 40’ Billboards or that's on the radio, or that's our jam, or that we like musically. We may love a song musically, but the lyrics are trash. And so that's where we get in trouble because we perpetuate this stuff over and over and over for different reasons, largely because of irresponsibility, or because our hands are tied, you know, because of the theology of the house where you serve. You know it's a number of reasons why this is happening, but it's definitely happening across the board. I'm not hearing much gospel that is Christo-centric or enough. Because I think that's one place where we can start with liberation. Also Greatest Commandment Theology, you know, love God, love neighbor, love self! This is the most important one. So all this other stuff. [I say] sit down somewhere until you get this right! I'm not hearing a lot of writing about that type of stuff. I'm not hearing writing about serving each other, loving each other, radical welcome, radical love, all of these kinds of things, nobody is really writing about that. We're writing about how to get a blessing, and if I do ‘this’ again, back to theology, you know, if I do ‘this’, God is going to do ‘this’, you know. Very transactional, very conditional. And it's not often based on loving God, neighbor, self. It’s based on, If I shout or don't shout, or how much I shout, or you know, if I praise, then this happens. If I don't praise, this doesn't happen. You know. How much am I putting in the offering? Where's my tithe going, you know? Is it God responding to my “this”? Even theologically, so many things that we deal with that are very transactional. And I think all of this has contributed to the lack of freedom and the lack of vulnerability because in church so many people are masked. But I think we're masked because of all of these things. So, for instance, if your theology is that if you do ‘this’, God will do ‘this’, and if you don't do ‘this’, God is going to get you - well, if that's your theology and that's what you're singing, that's what you're preaching, that's what you're presenting - that's what you're living. That's your felt theology. That's your handed-down theology, you're not going to be able

to be in total peace, in total freedom, because it's a rule-keeping theology. It's again, very transactional. So now God is not the loving figure. It's like God is a slave master. A Genie. A magician."

Flemming: *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation? How do you see music/art potentially playing a role in the imagined future of the church?*

Harris: "One thing I learned as I've been blessed to travel internationally, doing ministry and even just locally. The one thing I know about music is that it transcends language. It in itself is a gathering tool. So you know, we don't even have to speak the same language, to enjoy the same music, to come together and sing the same music. So if we allow music to do the work. We don't have to do a whole lot. But the other piece to that is relinquishing us. Surrendering to what needs to happen. Coming into a space and understanding that first of all, this is a God space. So, therefore, it is a place of liberty is a place of freedom. Every adjective that we can use to describe God should be used to be able to be used to describe the space where he dwells. So if we're gathering and we use music to be the gathering factor, If we're coming in with the right mindset, then the work should not be difficult. It starts with mindset. It starts with relinquishing everything we think we know, or every bias everything that we think is wrong according to us, not necessarily according to what God has said. Because, you know, we church folks put a lot of "us" in there. And God never said it!" So I just believe that music can be the change agent. But it has to be among people who want to change and recognize that change is needed."

Flemming*: What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation? How do you see music/art potentially playing a role in the imagined future of the church?*

Campbell: To speak candidly, I spend a lot of time considering Black queernesses and Black sexual discretions in the context of Black worship. It's simply like 'Black' kind of calls on a type of charismatic worship. Specifically, Black Pentecostal charismatic worship, and how their ecosystems are of people who are very much like not trying to be 'open in the affirming,' but who are very much living open and affirming terms with themselves, and they're doing just fine. And I think about the ways in which that is lived out through music that comes out of our traditions, and that is being actively generated and composed. They're not thinking about using gender-neutral pronouns for God, but at the same time, they are experiencing their own kind of liberation or their own kind of freedom on their own terms. And I wonder about the limits of that. I wonder whether, what if, in like Black charismatic spaces, we considered like what it would mean for God to not be 'he' sometimes, or for us to like, unpack theologies around "kingdom" and around domination and dominion and that sort of thing? Even for affirming spaces as well."

"I think the Church will really have to, in an active sense, disabuse itself of the notion of any sort of division between sacred and secular, especially at the expense of divisions between just an unjust, right? I think we can become really concerned about those divides, and I think a lot of that is probably projection on my part because, to center myself for a second, like I'm in the midst of finishing a project that is decidedly not gospel. I am in a deep sense okay with that and also experience a lot of anxiety around that because of the space I occupy as a minister, a worship arts professional, and also an artist. It's as much as I would sometimes wish that those

worlds were separate. They are really intertwined. But I think the sort of respectable Black establishment of church across high, low, liturgies will have to work with the question, what actually is profane? What is actually secular, and what actually is sacred?"

"We need to invest in the arts of worship because there is a place that we can't get to in terms of both like expression and reception of what we need spiritually unless it's opened up by like good worship, art, trained worship, and like spiritually inflected, spiritually connected worship art. I think that's nothing new to our traditions right? Like even just in Africa diasporic traditions like the arbiters of those spaces, the openers and closers of the doors, right even, are their musicians their minstrels, right? It's those people! And I think recognizing that that's an important place to get to for people who are experiencing gratuitous violence and a lot of just stuff in life that they need that access point to that spiritual space. Recognizing that is important and recognizing that the people who are often gifted to take us to those places have very complex lives. They bring with them lots of experiences that "church" has traditionally not been willing to hold in a posture of care that will be equally important. From the choir director, down to the really talented kid who is an organist, or a drummer, right? Like just having like structures of care and support for the levels of musical sophistication and genius that come out of these communities right? Because it's like a lot of weight and a lot of mental stuff that people go through. So recognizing the importance of the people who get us there as well."
"There are no lines! People just exist!"

Flemming: *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation?*

Jon Jon: “Back during slavery times, We sang songs they didn't understand, but we knew what we were singing about. We had to make our own music. That was our freedom. It was our freedom. And I think that's what has carried us on to today, where people feel free. That's how we as Black people are able to become free in ourselves and as Creatives, and we are helping other people become free.”

Flemming: *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation? How do you see music/art potentially playing a role in the imagined future of the church?*

Sullivan Sharpe: “I feel like we need more inclusive music. That we create music that makes everybody feel apart.”

“I think there's a richness to Black gospel music, I really do.”

Flemming: *What are some of the needs/pathways the church will need to reflect on to carve out liberation? Why is it important to blur those lines?*

Shelley: “I guess it's a lie, right? And we need to accept it! Because people are… I mean, think about the fact that we have the Clark Sisters here [at Yale]. But the history of gospel music is the sanctification of allegedly secular sounds which are themselves secularizing allegedly sanctified sounds, right? That promiscuous movement back and forth across these boundaries. I mean, obviously what we call the Gospel blues and the man that so many people call the Father of Gospel Music is the blues, man, you know? I guess part of this, what this goes back to is just the need to allow Black people, Black humans to be complex and at the same time to be integrated

individuals, which is to say that the people who listen and make the music are not listening across these lines. Twinkie had to hear Stevie Wonder somewhere, right? You have to listen widely in order to be in conversation with people around you. You wouldn't have this contact between musical practices if people weren't listening, right? And it's not a shameful secret. it's the fact that we live in the world. And so I mean, I think that maybe the way to do this is to say that the sacred-secular binary is a silly way of accounting for like the fact that we live in a material world."

"Seeking to maintain deep and deepening connections with the rest of what is. And so, I think it is good to have occasions when you lean into the holy. But the leaning in is not erasing the rest. It's intentional like I'm going to practice this as my focus for now. And not just in the church building, not just in devotion, but in an ongoing way I'm strengthening my ties. Because the fact is, you know, I mean, I talk about 'the shout' in phenomenological terms. Actually, the shout is a performance of being in two worlds at the same time, right? And the most interesting thing is that the more embodied you are, the more fleshly you are in terms of, like the actual movement of your joints and muscles, the more spiritual you are right like - "Oh, he was, she was really in the spirit today, the ghost really had her….that body was really moving!" So it's paradoxical in the way, the experience of this, how the experience of the spirit is unthinkable without the mediation of the body. So, you know the polarities of sacred and secular, they're just not helpful for thinking about how people actually live and create!"

"I mean, I think when it's done right, Black religious sound does not offer escape, distraction, or opiate. But I think it puts the present arrangement of social affairs, political, and economic, affairs in perspective by reminding us of the higher alternative that hovers over and

around us, beckoning us to be better, do more, and imagine more, to want more. So I think the role of the sacred arts, the role of all the arts is to keep imagining otherwise. I mean, that's the claim, right?"

"That there's 'Balm and Gilead' that 'God is', you know. I mean, you know, we got all these complicated situations, right? Where, like we think about how we sing, and what we say to people. You know. God can heal you, right? And is that an ableist thing? Am I certain that you are incompletely human because your body is either differently structured or differently enabled, differently functioning than mine? Is that what I'm saying? Or is it about saying whatever is now, is not all that can't be, right? I think that's helped me get out of some things people overdo because people overdo it and want to pull people out of wheelchairs and stuff. As if to say their whole goal was "If you don't get out of the wheelchair. Did God not come?" Are you not loved? And so what if the wheelchair is fine for you? Like this as an implement, as a prosthesis for your mobility? Right? So we go too far with that. The real message is to say, let these arts remind you that whatever you individually, or we collectively seem to be stuck in, there might be another world."

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This concluding chapter offers an overview of the most important defining points, reflections on the image of God, theological understandings of the sacred and secular, the implications of the work's main argument, modern biblical interpretations, engagement with ethnomusicologists, and the limitations of the study. The purpose of this work is to advance notions of theological challenge that lead us to reflect on ideas of the holy in the direction of inclusion, beyond dichotomies, categories, and descriptive distinctions that work to endure separation. Many confusing doctrinal distinctions cause differences in perspectives within the Black church. Across all denominations, the elders of each congregation naturally struggle with the ambitions of their youth, because the conditions under which they were raised are not the same conditions the youth of the church or raised in. One might rightfully assume that we are all living in the same space, but the truth of the matter is that the youth of a church or being informed from a completely different perspective than the elders of a church - through social environment, music, entertainment, etc. However, the problem is not solely about the generational disparities between age groups, but about a larger foundational issue that takes place at the root.

Perhaps a concluding thought might lead us to consider the following idea about liberation through euphoria that happens when we engage in musical arts with the intent to be

free. Liberation happens in the most authentic places and from the most authentic place. The ways to arrive at the most authentic place: desperation by force (slavery, poverty, depression), revelation by self-awareness-acceptance (coming to terms with self), and consecration (John Coltrane slept in the attic for weeks to compose 'A Love Supreme'). The great mystic, Howard Thurman, once charged the students of Spelman College in this way, "There is something in every one of you that waits, listens for the genuine in yourself—and if you cannot hear it, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching and if you hear it and then do not follow it, it was better that you had never been born. You are the only you that has ever lived; your idiom is the only idiom of its kind in all the existences, and if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls….Now, if I hear the sound of the genuine in me and if you hear the sound of the genuine in you, it is possible for me to go down in [my spirit] and come up in [your spirit]. So that when I look at myself through your eyes having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me. [Then] the wall that separates and divides will disappear, and we will become one because of the sound of the genuine makes the same music."[42]

Biblical Debates

To enter conversations on biblical interpretation, one must be open to challenging and/or open interpretations of scripture. The problems that arise when reading sacred texts often comes from the missing contextual information that undergirds the arguments these texts present. General observations from a Western conservative views of the American Christian Bible suppose that the text itself supports notions of sacred and secular divisions, inferred from reading

[42] Thurman, Howard, "The Sound of the Genuine (Baccalaureate ceremony) (Spelman College), 1980 May 4," The Howard Thurman Digital Archive, accessed December 3, 2023.

English translations of the text. However, a more productive way to approach reading the text might push readers to think about the context of each scripture, its political situatedness, and its process from storytelling, canonization, print and production, and then interpretation.

With this in mind, the texts that indirectly refer to a sacred and secular dichotomy only loosely reference cultural rules for an ancient Jewish milieu. However, situated in the heart of a devout American Christian, these rules may not have as much of a direct correlation as one might assume. Perhaps the best way to think through biblical debates is to offer critique(s) of the use of Ancient Jewish texts (Old Testament Bible) to support ideas of sacred/secular dichotomies, as well as Greco-Roman texts (New Testament Bible) to support these claims. From Old Testament passages, let's start with Leviticus 11[43] for example:

> 4 "There are some that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. 5 The hyrax, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you. 6 The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you. 7 And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. 8 You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you."
>
> 9 "Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales. 10 But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales—whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water—you are to regard as unclean. 11 And since you are to regard them as unclean, you must not eat their meat; you must regard their carcasses as unclean. 12 Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be regarded as unclean by you."

While some Hebrew words can assume an English translation of the words "Sacred" and "Secular," cultural assumptions have lead many readers to offer replacement synonyms for the terms "Clean" and "Unclean." While these assumptions make for easy and simple reading, they

[43] Leviticus 11:4-12; 24-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

can develop irresponsible practices when reading and interpreting the "Bible" from a purely sacred lens with the intent to live one's limited interpretations out in the here and now.

> 24 "'You will make yourselves unclean by these; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. 25 Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening.

Verse 24 completely removes the contextual relevance of the text itself and automatically disqualifies any notions of relevant interpretation for American Christians, particularly in Black churches, due to one theme lifted from this passage, time. Ancient Jewish customs employ time as a mechanism for the ritual of cleansing which happens by way of a weekly cycle, regulated by the Sabbath. Each week, devout Jews of antiquity would enter ritual baths, sacred readings, and dietary cleansing practices for the purpose of reconciling their bodies back to an acceptable state for their God, whom they believed rested in the temple mount on a hill at the center of Jerusalem. Only the holiest of them would be allowed to enter the temple. The divisions amongst who might be deemed holiest were decided by social identities like spiritual ranking (priest, temple aid, etc) or gender-based distinctions (male/female). Those cultural regulations do not exist in Black American Christianity as they do in ancient Jewish customs, the intended cultural audience for such texts.

In reference to the sacred/secular, clean/unclean paradigm, the following New Testament scripture reference points Black Christian readers to reimagine Old Testament interpretations, at the least to adopt a cultural perspective of the text that is much more functional and useful for their cultural context.

Mark 7:1-14 [44] records:

[44] Mark 7:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

7 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem
gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with
defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews,
do not eat unless they wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders, 4
and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash, and there are also
many other traditions that they observe: the washing of cups and pots and bronze
kettles and beds.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your
disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders but eat with defiled hands?"
6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written
'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

7 In vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

8 "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

9 Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God
in order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your
mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' 11 But you
say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from
me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God), 12 then you no longer permit doing
anything for a father or mother, 13 thus nullifying the word of God through your
tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and
understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the
things that come out are what defile."

In this scripture reference, Jesus brings opposition to the assumed customs of ancient Jews within his own tradition. How much more can one assess the differences between the customs of ancient Jews and modern Black American Christians? Two totally different contexts, two completely different cultures. It's harmful to assume direct rules and regulations from ancient texts that do not provide enough context to justify interpretation. Furthermore, this example of Jesus is more closely aligned with defying the traditional rules of a culture, rather than abiding by them. Not defiance unto disruption, but unto an idea of fulfillment - adopting a notion that the rules for the sake of just existing as rules themselves have no real current relevance because the

purpose of the rules was to maintain ritual cleanliness standards. Jesus reinterprets the rules as they stand to get to the root of cleanliness. There Jesus suggests that cleanliness is not defined or determined by how one washes their hands or their plates before they partake in a meal. Instead, the focus of cleanliness should be on what he terms, the heart - the inner beliefs, understandings, and ethics of a person.

Lastly, the Apostle Paul offers a definitive disturbance in the sacred/secular dichotomy in his letter to the Galatians by finding a clever way to reconcile the Jewish promise God makes to Abraham in the Old Testament with the covenant established as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul in Galatians[45] writes:

15 Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will[d] has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring;[e] it does not say, "And to offsprings,"[f] as of many, but it says, "And to your offspring,"[g] that is, to one person, who is Christ. **17** My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. **18** For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise, but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions until the offspring[h] would come to whom the promise had been made, and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. **20** Now a mediator involves more than one party, but God is one.

21 Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. **22** But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through the faith of Jesus Christ[i] might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. **24** Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be reckoned as righteous[j] by faith. **25** But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, **26** for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. **27** As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no

[45] Galatians 3:15-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,[k] heirs according to the promise.

In this brief letter, Paul addresses the purpose of a law, a Jewish law established and promised to the children of Israel in the days of Abraham, even in his own cultural climate which is inherently different than the one he's writing about. Being invested in the evolution of that culture, he took on the argument that such customs should remain for all people, legally, beyond belief. However, Paul identifies with the Jesus followers of antiquity and admonishes them to stand firm in their belief. For those politically disinherited from Jewish customaries, Jesus is the one who allows them to be reconciled with God, beyond the need to be ritually cleaned by Jewish standards. Finally, Paul concludes the message by asserting that the distinction of cultural difference is not a valid means for imposing dichotomies, establishing distinctions, or employing separation tactics based on faith. Paul suggests that "Faith in Jesus" is the core binding method for all people. And in that, Faith is that which severs all differences, for in Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Gentile (other translations affirm the word "Ethne" or people from other nations), but all are one in Jesus Christ.

With a nuanced biblical perspective, the text illuminates principles of unity and commonality while actively rejecting principles of separation and dichotomizing differences as sacred and secular. God is God here as well as there. God is God everywhere. Everything and everyone is undoubtedly made in that image and with the purpose of love. Religious missions, scripture readings, and sermons that do not promote love and unity at the center do not inherently promote the mission of Jesus Christ. They should evaluate their proximities to the liberative message of the Gospel. At its core, it fosters inclusion beyond identity markers and excludes practices that foster exclusion.

Imago Dei

Theologically thinking, the God that Black folks express in their churches and that seems to be reflected in Christian scriptures, takes on various identity markers and images - particularly in the biblical text. In one setting, the God of "The Bible" is concerned with avenging the people of Israel while persecuting those he calls his children. In other narratives, God is understood as a force that made an offspring, a direct descendant of God's self, and then allowed that offspring to be killed in the form of Jesus. Other times, God is seen as merciful, a healer, a deliverer, and a way-maker for colloquial expression. Beyond the Biblical text, in popular culture, God is depicted as an old white man with a long beard. God has also been depicted as Black in more culturally progressive spaces. God has been reflected as a means to satisfaction for so many people. While each image proposes differences between God and those who seek him, parishioners are often stuck at notions framed in dichotomies, binaries, and complexities that cannot be resolved through conversation. Those who deem themselves religiously Christian should understand the problems with many of the images that depict God. The concept of God is far more expansive than these ideas and descriptions. God is a much bigger concept than a white man with a triton who lives in the sky with angels and clouds surrounding him. Perhaps that is a recapitulation of the Greek god Zeus or the Roman god Jupiter. Maybe our imaginations of God have been influenced by the Greco-Roman world, and rightfully so. However, an even better way to think about God is to see God as a "spirit," and to understand that God represents all of us. James Baldwin wrote to his nephew in *The Fire Next Time*, "There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you."[46] God can

[46] Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage, 2013, 7.

be found in each of us as well as our creations. God, in this case, is motion who sets things in motion; consider Aristole's "Unmoved Mover."

Present now, there are groups of folks who'd rather see things done the "old way." It is entirely natural for humans to experience difficulty embracing change. The discomfort that comes with change is never comfortable. However, the conditions that allow the youth in Black churches to thrive in society are different from the conditions of the past. Therefore, if the Black church should advance into the future, it must embrace change - not just in general but, more specifically, change related to nurturing the lived experiences of its youth. First, Black churches will need to allow their perceptions of the idea of God to evolve. So much of the imagery in Black churches about God or God-like things comes from a default understanding based on pain, suffering, trauma, and struggle as a pursuit to know God. Sermons from popular Black preachers often posit that pain is a prerequisite for eternal life. There is a foundational belief in most Black churches that sin initiated a longevous separation between God and humans. A better approach to the idea of God would cause us to think about how humans are simply reflections of God and not merely respondents to dominant order and chaos.

Understanding God (the Sacred)

The methods by which spiritual experiences are generated involve a belief in the aid of a power source beyond one's strength and the memory of the power from previous moments. Each of the creatives interviewed in this study offered stories of earlier experiences that caused them to relive the moments in their lives where they felt most transformed. Whether they remembered something happening to someone else or recollected times when they were changed within themselves, something about music pushed them to experience the divine in ways that are both

traditionally and non-traditionally understood by outsiders (someone not engaged in their experience). The type of transformation that takes place can only be described by the ones involved. For the sacred saint, these occurrences generally happen in a Black church. For the secularist, the Beyonce concert will suffice. Either perspective offers insight into the way spirit moves.

Understanding the Secular

Together with ideas of Sacred and Secular, particularly in conversations about music, parishioners will understand the power of spirit. Spirit is not limited to the people that identify it. Spirit is not bound to notions already understood. The power of spirit is that it always seeks to expand beyond the limitations of human understanding. The power of this work is that it seeks to move Black churches beyond the limitations of the four walls dedicated and consecrated for worship. While a centralized location for worship is necessary for intentional engagement with community, the spirit cannot be limited by location. There are no limitations to the spirit. If the general mission of Black churches becomes one that emphasizes power displayed beyond the four walls of the church, we might begin to approximate where God shows up in everyone's everyday lives.

The church is not a genius institution because of its ability to be exclusive but to be inclusive. Why not find ways to be inclusive of spirit? Churches in antiquity were established because those who were being persecuted by the Roman state needed a place to worship peacefully. They indeed practiced inclusion because they were desperate for space and spaces that welcomed them. They made inclusion happen. They did not have the economic power to purchase facilities or multimillion-dollar campuses in order to gather the community for worship.

Instead, they met in people's houses. Likewise, slaves in the antebellum South had no access to means or wealth and were forced to fight for their lives on a daily basis. They were not promised luxuries or the chance to be considered full citizens of America, even to the detriment of the nation. All they had access to was their communities, their families and themselves. So they formed bonds with each other on plantations and held worship services outdoors. They gathered in circles, prayed and sang to the glory of God anyway, and believed that there was a life worth living beyond the present. They indeed embraced the otherwise, the spirit, God, without means! Spiritual engagement is not about economic stability but rather about love, liberty, and joy!

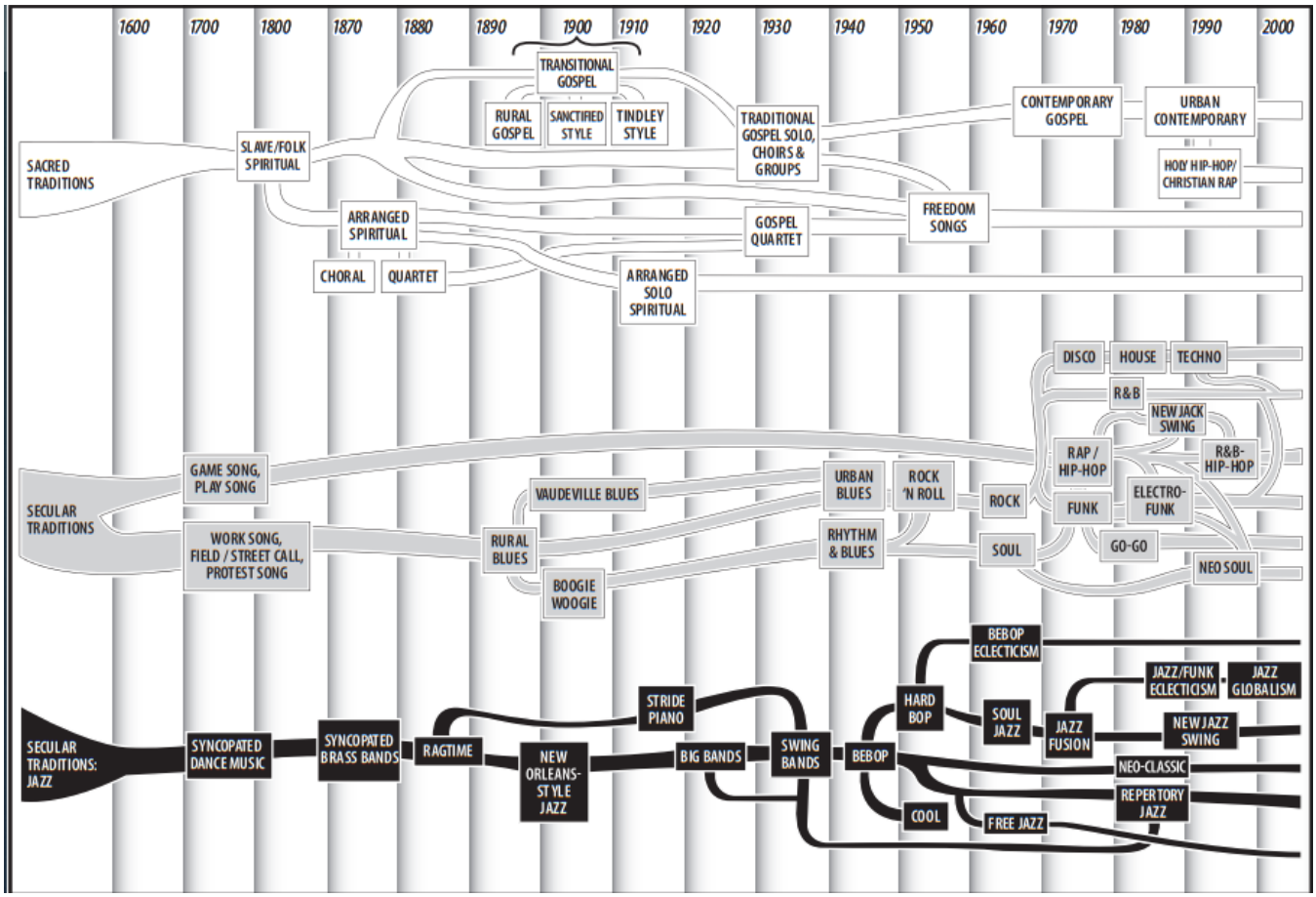

Figure 5 - African-American Music Timeline
1980 Portia K. Maultsby, Ph.D.
Revised 1992, 1995, 2012, 2014 All Rights Reserved
African American Music: An Introduction by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby

Scholars for centuries have often searched for the best ways to accurately describe the complexities of African-American artistic expressions. Some contended that the slaves brought to the Americas from the western coast of Africa were stripped of their artistic power as a result of the harsh treatment of chattel slavery. However, a more critical observation of the history of

African-American music lends a much different outcome. In their work, *African American Music: An Introduction*, ethnomusicology scholars Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby of Indiana University, provide a survey of the history of Black music beginning with roots in Western Africa and advancing to the modern sounds of contemporary Hip-Hop and R&B. They suggest, "Before the invention of sound recording, the only means of preserving music was a notational system devised for European music. Musicologists and folklorists who tried to notate African or African American music had to omit or modify its distinguishing characteristics: blue notes, rhythmic complexities, overlapping of leader and chorus, melodic embellishments, and distinctive approaches to timbre. At best, these notated versions approximate the music; at worst, they distort it. Nevertheless, contemporary descriptions of African American music are meaningful. They document its existence, describe its salient features as viewed first hand, and provide the basis for a continuing history."[47]

Concluding thoughts for this project might encourage readers to consider the following points. It is likewise an irresponsible assertation to suggest that Gospel music is indeed the root of rhythm and Blues/Popular Black music for the following reasons: First, the blues, or blues music (the genre that birthed rhythm and blues) predates gospel music as an established genre by several decades. Second, Thomas A. Dorsey, known as the "Father of Gospel Music," began his career as a blues and jazz musician. Burnim and Maultsby record that "Gospel music is the twentieth-century form of African American religious music that evolved in urban cities following the Great Migration of Blacks from the agrarian South in the period surrounding World Wars I and II. Although the musical foundation for this genre was laid in several different contexts in the first quarter of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1930s that the term

[47] Burnim, and Maultsby, *African American Music: An Introduction*, 2014, 35.

'gospel music,' as well as its repertoire and distinctive performance style, gained widespread usage among Blacks across denominational lines. It was during this decade that Thomas Dorsey, lauded as the "Father of Gospel Music," relinquished his career as an accomplished blues and jazz pianist-composer, and devoted himself entirely to the development and advancement of gospel music."[48]

And lastly, Gospel music is a fusion of several genres including blues, jazz, and the spirituals. What is more appropriate to surmise is that the spirituals/sacred and secular (not spiritual) African slave tunes sung during fieldwork, child's play, protest, and cultural celebrations are rooted in the same intent, the emotional expressions of the African heart (the pain, trauma, and fight for liberation identified by despair). Both the spirituals/sacred songs and the secular songs made by African slaves influenced and informed each other. The spirituals informed the secular and the secular informed the spirituals. The social, political, and religious life of slaves were so intertwined that the separation was indistinguishable. Burnim and Maultsby suggest, "The blues was not the only new musical development to emerge in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. Instead, it should be viewed as part of a wave of innovation in Black American music at this time that also saw the first stirrings of ragtime, jazz, gospel music, and barbershop-style vocal harmony. This occurred in conjunction with significant new developments in literature, theater, and the arts in general, as well as in Black political and religious life."[49] In addition, they assert, "While students of gospel music can argue the significance of specific artists, events, and geographic locales as having sparked its current widespread popularity and stature, in actuality, the development of gospel resulted from a

[48] Ibid, 189
[49] Ibid, 119

complex intertwining of people, places, and processes that collectively generated a music representative of broadly shared African American musical values and cultural ideals."[50]

Likewise, as the spirituals reciprocally influenced secular music, especially the protest song, Gospel music reciprocally influenced the sub-genre of Rhythm and blues known as Soul Music. Soul music is the secular protest song, a continuation of the protest songs sung during the time of slavery. – by various artists, many of whom come from Spiritual/Gospel roots like Sam Cook, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin, with a mission and intent for the liberation of the people. The legacy of soul music is, therefore, now Hip-Hop. A continuation of Black protest from Public Enemy of the 1980s to Kendrick Lamar. Soul music is secular music, but Soul music is not defiled, spiritually diminished, or a disruption to the work of God. Instead, Soul music is the voice of God in the world, beyond the church. Its mission is indeed the liberation of the people.

With shared roots in blues music, just like Gospel, it protests the mistreatment of African Americans and demands that power be granted to Black communities for economic stability, the assurance of safety, and opportunities for upward mobility in society. Burnim and Maultsby report that "Early soul styles paralleled the broad popularity of Black gospel music and coincided with the beginning of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, of which music was an integral component. The singers transformed the repertoire of spirituals, gospel music, and rhythm and blues into freedom songs during sit-ins, marches, and freedom rides. The result was the further blurring of the sacred/secular boundaries within these political contexts."[51] Some of the most notable Black soul artists of the 50s and 60s during the height of the Civil Rights movement engaged in acts of resistance towards white supremacy through their music. Though they were

[50] Ibid, 190
[51] Ibid 277

met with great challenges, liberation as a mission remained at the heart. Burnim and Maultsby describe their genius in this way: "The pioneers of soul— Ray Charles, James Brown, and Sam Cooke— share common musical roots in Black gospel music, which inspired their transformation of rhythm and blues into the sound of soul. Although some of the early rhythm and blues vocal groups introduced a gospel quartet sound to Black popular music by substituting secular lyrics for religious ones (e.g., the Dominoes' 'Have Mercy Baby,' 1952). Ray Charles was the first to consistently incorporate a full range of components from Black church culture in rhythm and blues, from structure to harmony, rhythmic organization, and vocal style. These innovations forged the evolution of soul music as a distinctive musical genre in the 1960s."[52] Though it is not inaccurate to assume Gospel music takes precedence over popular music and stands as a central influence on the sound of modern Black music, it is better to conclude that Black music has always consisted of a large melting pot of flavors, textures, ideas, narratives, and intentions. From the spirituals to the blues, and from Gospel to soul music and hip-hop, the legacy of liberation remains. At its core is a foundational commitment to conjuring a spirit of resistance that aids in the power struggle for justice and liberation. "A strength beyond our strength," in the words of Howard Thurman. Lastly, Burnim and Maultsby write, "Through the songs of Brown and other soul singers, Black America began to identify with and embrace these concepts. After Brown's performance of 'Say it Loud' in Houston, Texas, less than two weeks after its release, his musical arranger Fred Wesley Jr. recalls: 'To my amazement when James hit the stage and yelled out, 'Say it loud,' there must have been 15,000 people who answered back, 'I'm Black and I'm proud!'...This record was very special. The message echoed the feelings of Black people at that time. With the new civil rights bill and the new voting rights bill amendment

[52] Ibid, 279

now firmly in place, Black people were ready for a theme song that inspired and inflamed that newfound spirit of pride and freedom.'"[53]

Finding Pentecost

What is it that supports the root of protest songs? What substance undergirds the power invoked in the protest song? What is it that sustains the protest in moments of weariness and fatigue? This is the point and power of a Pentecost. Pentecost is an experience that happens by way of conjuration. When one summons the power of the holy spirit to come amongst them and to aid in power and prestige against the forces of darkness, that is Pentecost. Furthermore, every song James Brown recorded in protest to the government, every lyric Aretha hummed from the core of her soul, and every melody projected from the voice of Sam Cook was aided by the holy spirit, summoned, conjured by a Pentecost - that happens when the people come together with one accord and one goal, liberation.

Implications - Debunking the False Dichotomy

The implications of this work are that God is everywhere, at all times, and inhabits all things. That is indeed the nature of spirit. Also, the other implications are that humans have always had permission, access, and gateways to engage that spirit, freely moving, freely flowing, freely being. Lastly, music, as the center of the work, is a centralizing method for engaging that spirit toward the purpose of liberation. Therefore, because the spirit is free and willing to engage

[53] Ibid, 283

humans at all times, the lines of demarcation, the distinction, and the dichotomy of sacred and secular music do not exist historically or present day because the spirit informs all genres.

God moves through it all, offering direction and guidance toward an end of liberation for the soul.

One might ask, how in the world do we justify the violence that happens in popular music, Rap (Rhythm and Poetry), and Hip-Hop? Why is there so much misogyny in popular music today? Are you arguing that God is those lyrics? Yes, God is moving through those lyrics. God is not stagnant in the music but moving through the music to communicate a directive toward liberation. It is on the human subject to engage with the spirit they feel moving through the music. The God of Christians might push a subject-engaging spirit to turn from violent lyrics as they listen (a conversion of sorts), and/or might also encourage the subject to engage the violence in a sort of protest (a rebellion of sorts as seen or understood in the pursuit of figures like Nat Turner or the riots due to the murder of George Floyd). How can God be violent? Spirit is not about violence, spirit is interested in liberation. If violence happens to be the means by which liberation comes about, there is grace and justification for those engaged rightfully in pursuit of liberation!

Limitations of the Study

The following observations regarding the study are limitations to consider for the future of this work and for further conversations. Though not intended for an exhaustive survey of information about all genres, music, religion, and understandings of spirituality, the data in this study was collected through a qualitative method, meaning that a small pool of participants was selected for interviews to obtain the data presented in Chapter 5. Other limitations of the study

would suggest the selection pool for interviews was not intently diverse. Still, the selection was taken from individuals who identify as Christian, with a church upbringing, currently engaged or have a previous engagement with a ministry. Other factors that limit the results of this study are that economic factors and or disparities were not considered. Everyone involved could be classified economically as working-class citizens or higher. Likewise, everyone involved is an a active professional in the music industry or music ministry generally. Many of them have earned top recognitions for their contributions to music broadly including Grammy Awards, and Oscar Nominations, and have become household names in their own right. Each of the participants identifies as Christian. The study is limited by religious diversity. The Abrahamic traditions or traditions of the Middle East like Islam and Judaism were not considered in the study. The arguments made in this study are purely Black, American, and Christian. No other nationalities were intentionally considered in the survey questions or selection process. Out of seven participants, only two identify as women - the study is limited on the basis of gender. The study does not include conversations outside of the following genres, Gospel, R&B, Hip-Hop, Rock, Soul, and Pop and their predecessors. Survey questions focused the conversations with participants in a specific direction, limited by only seven questions. No more questions were offered or asked. The language used to describe this study is not particularly accessible to the general public, but rather geared toward academic communities in the study of religion and music broadly.

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Definitions:

Welcome – a willingness to listen openly, with understanding and empathy to everyone who comes to UNDRGRND.

Pentecost - the conjuring, coming awareness, development, revelation, and realization of the Holy Spirit in the here and now.

Pentecostalism - the embodiment of outer body ecstasy, euphoria toward an experience of liberation in an intended spiritual manner/setting.

Holiness Movement -
TARAB - ARABIC - http://arabicmusicband.com/articles/tarab

APPENDIX A – IRB Research Protocol

New York Theological Seminary
Institutional Review Board Application—
Research Protocol

1. List your name, contact information, and the name of the institution, course, or project to which your research is related. List the names and contact information for your faculty advisors to this project (or note for faculty designed classroom assignments or faculty research, n/a).

Principal Investigator

Aric B. Flemming, Jr.
Harvard Business School
Wyss House Suite 102
Boston, MA 02163
aflemming@hbs.edu
(770) 366-5062

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Chadwick Brawley
Worship & Arts Director, The Luke Church
2380 S Houston Ave, Humble, TX 77396
chad@thebrawleygroupconsulting.com
(713) 545-6608

2. Explain the nature and purpose of this research. What do you hope to learn and why?

What is the influence of gospel music on contemporary Black cultural producers? The African-American church has historically wrestled with dichotomizing religious experiences that happen inside and outside of churches. Those that happen inside the church are understood as sacred. Those that happen outside of the church are deemed secular, worldly, or even demonic. Perhaps we'll find through this study that the existing dichotomy of sacred and secular music for Black musicians/producers, or those developed by the sounds of Black churches, is non-existent. The spiritual experiences that one has listening to gospel music can likewise happen when listening to music that is deemed secular. Perhaps by ridding Black churches of this assumed separation, we might gain an appreciation for the ways in which Black religion is experienced inside and outside of Black churches through cultural producers, ministry leaders, and non-traditional religious performances.

3. Describe your research methods and procedures.
Be specific. Indicate the length of time involved and the place where you plan to conduct interviews or observations. Explain how you will select or recruit participants, and how you plan to make and keep records for your research. Specify your intentions for the use of visual records, such as photographs and videotapes.

A case study will be conducted of 7 different creative professionals engaged in public discourse of popular media, raised in the traditions of Black churches.

Each person will have a 45 minute interview with me recorded on zoom where they will be asked a series of questions tailored to their work, expertise, and experience. During that time, participants will be individually interviewed; We will begin with demographic questions (e.g., age, location, occupation, tenure in music production). From there, each respondent will be interviewed around three broad domains: (1) musical experiences growing up in Black church (2) moments of creative euphoria while engaging the arts (3) ways the church can move forward toward a practice of liberation.

Responses will be recorded and initially kept on a laptop. Daily, the interviews will be backed up and kept on the principal investigator's password protected Google drive.

There will be use of visual records.

4. Attach a copy of all survey instruments or a list of the questions that you intend to ask potential participants. If these questions are not completely settled, submit your tentative plans.

See Appendix C of the dissertation proposal

5. Describe your relationship to the potential participants. Are you their pastor, chaplain, teacher, friend or other?

The Principal Investigator has no formal relationship with any of the participants. However, because of trafficking in the same social circles, he may know some of them socially. Several of them, he has had the chance to collaborate with them creatively at church, in the recording studio, and/on stage. One of them is his former professor at Harvard University.

6. Discuss any potential benefits you envision for the participants in your study. What is the good that you hope will result from this study? What benefits, if any, will accrue to the participants?

By participating in this study, the Principal Investigator hopes to empower participants with newfound desire and tools for engaging in practices of liberation to enhance the Black church and to both conduct their social justice work as well as to advance their professional pursuits.

7. Discuss any potential risks to the participants in your study.
Are any of your participants members of vulnerable groups (such as children, persons with stigmatizing illnesses, whistleblowers, prisoners, persons with physically or mentally disabling conditions, etc.)? Explain the measures you will take to provide for their privacy. Explain how you will respond if a participant has adverse effects as a result of your study.

None of the participants are members of vulnerable groups. Participants' privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. While none of the questions are expected to be emotionally or psychologically triggering, respondents can skip any question or drop out of the interview entirely, with no expectation of reprisal.

8. Explain the policies and procedures that you will use to insure the confidentiality and or anonymity of your participants.
Will you use pseudonyms or a numerical coding system? Are there any factors other than names that might identify your research subjects? If so, what will you do to ensure anonymity? How will your data be stored? How long will the data be kept?

While demographic information will be gathered from respondents, they will be aggregate and quantitatively analyzed collectively, such that individuals will not be misrepresented. Data will be stored on a password protected Google drive. Upon completion of the dissertation, the data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

9. Include a copy of any consent forms that you are planning to use. The language used on these forms should be clear, simple, and straightforward, not laden with technical jargon.

See below.

10.What will happen to the final report of your research? Do you plan to share the summary with the class, community or congregation? What form will this representation take, and what media will you use? List any possible venues in which you might publish this work now or in the future.

The final report will be presented to the gathering(s) of the participants. The information will be available in written form (the actual document) as well as PowerPoint (when presented verbally by the Principal Investigator). Currently, there are no plans to publish the findings. However, if publication takes place, it will most likely be in academic peer-reviewed publications focussing on religion, social justice, and/or their intersections.

APPENDIX B – IRB Interview Protocol

New York Theological Seminary Informed Consent Form

Introduction

My name is Aric Flemming and I'm a student at New York Theological Seminary conducting research for my dissertation. My phone number is 770.366.5062. My email address is aflemming@hbs.edu.

My research supervisor is Dr. Chadwick Brawley. His phone number is 713.545.6608. His email address is *chad@thebrawleygroupconsulting.com*.

(Feel free to contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.)

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to study how music creatives/producers who are engaged in the church or raised in church imagine the future of sacred and secular sounds in Black churches and how these sounds might inform religious experience toward social liberation. Data for this study will be collected online through conversation and dialogue on Zoom.

Procedure

If you consent to participating in this study, you will be asked to participate in a brief interview. There will be no

commitments beyond that interview. During the conversation, notes will be taken, audio and video recordings will also be utilized.

Time Required

While the time varies based on your answers and the flow of the conversation, most interviews take about 45 minutes.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks

I anticipate no known risks associated with this study. In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately.

Benefits

While there are no guaranteed benefits, it is possible that you may enjoy participating in this research and/or sharing your responses to research questions, or that you will find the project personally or spiritually meaningful.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

Your name will be kept confidential in all the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present during the project's research.

Importance of Candor

It is essential to this kind of research that all responses from participants be open, candid, forthright, and honest.

Sharing the Results

Results of research may be shared through class presentation, in written form, or in other ways. There is the possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

Before You Sign

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this project with the possibility of your words being written in a final paper. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your full satisfaction before signing this document. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you. Separate copies will be kept in a sealed envelope in a locked file cabinet in the New York Theological Seminary Dean's office and by the researcher.

Print Participant's Name:

_____

Participant's Signature:

_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: ___Aric Flemming_____

Researcher's Signature: _____**Aric Flemming**_____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Demographics:

Age
Gender
Tenure in TFAM
Level of education
Affiliation (come back)

Longterm Sustainability

What do you think TFAM needs to put in place or better put in place for longterm sustainability

- Probe for at least two items

How do you think TFAM should go about making that happen?

- Probe for at least two items

Economic Sustainability

What support do you need to raise monies for your TFAM-related efforts?

- Probe for at least two items

What support do you think other leaders in TFAM need to raise monies for their TFAM-related efforts?

- Probe for at least two items

Educational Sustainability

What support do you need to advance your own theological education?

- Probe for at least two items

What support do you think other leaders in TFAM need to advance their own theological education?

- Probe for at least two items

Evaluation of Project Access (~125)

- If you ran Project Access, what are three things you would definitely change?
- If you ran it, what are three things you would definitely keep the same?

APPENDIX D: Works Consulted

The following sources were consulted in the construction of this project, but not referenced directly in the form of quotations and/or material linked to the study. The use of these texts was for the sole purpose of collecting ideas, wrestling with theological concepts, and proposing a dissertation thesis.

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